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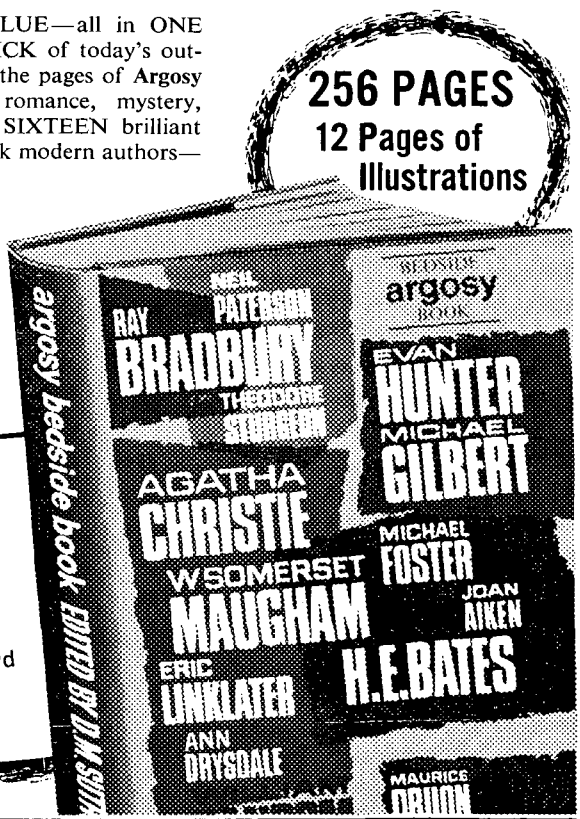

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the assassins

BY PETER USTINOV

AT WHAT age should assassins retire? This burning question was exercising Monsieur Ambroise Plageot, the newly appointed head of the bureau of the French Sûreté entitled Eloignement. The purpose of this department is to safeguard the persons of foreign dignitaries visiting France by rounding up all potential assassins and sending them away for a while. Monsieur Plageot's brow furrowed as he looked up from the pile of documents before him and studied the figure of the man who was seated opposite him.

"You say that you had a pleasant relationship with my predecessor, Monsieur Latille?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It was a blow to all of us when he retired."

"All of you? There are more of you?"

"Six in all. Members of the Nihilist International."

"Nihilism went out before the turn of the century."

"That's what many people think."

Plageot sighed. He was half amused, half mystified, but being a good civil servant, he could allow himself to show neither emotion. His eye roved once again over the documents. The earliest one was dated July 18, 1903. It was yellowed and fragile. Attached to it was a dignified photograph of a youth with a vast shock of black hair whose long neck emerged from a butterfly collar several sizes too large. His name was Bratko Zvoinitch. The spindly, nervous hand of some long-dead policeman proclaimed that he had been detained at the request of the consul general of Montenegro as a suspected member of a terrorist organisation.

Briefly Plageot fingered his way through the other papers in

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the Zvoinitch file. In 1910, when he was arrested again, he was called Bruno Silberberg.

"Why did you change your name to Silberberg?"

"Did I? Oh, you know, I've had so many names in my life, I really can't remember why I adopted any particular one."

"Why choose Silberberg. You're not Jewish, are you?"

"If I had been, I would hardly have called myself Silberberg. You have to be a gentile to choose a Jewish name voluntarily. I think I occasionally choose a Jewish name in order to identify myself more closely with that great and victimised race. Revolutionaries can really exist only when they are in the minority. They are the living conscience of mankind. They are the forerunners of progress, the martyrs who lead the way. They act the dream instead of waiting lazily for the reality which may follow a century later."

"I see."

Plageot looked over his glasses and compared the face of the dark youth on the photograph with the wizened and asthmatic figure before him. There was no hair left, not a strand, not the trace of a root. The head was polished and locked into an awkward stooping position by some misfortune. His inability to move his head, the wrinkles at the back of his neck, and his great hooded eyelids, one of them billowing over three-quarters of his right eye like a sail, gave him the aspect of a tortoise, at once wise and ridiculous. The name of the maker of his jacket was clearly visible as the garment stood up of its own accord to enclose flesh which was no longer there. His perpetual smile was not humorous so much as ironic, as though he expected little of men, but the firm lines near the corners of his mouth suggested that he was used to taking more than they offered. There was something Levantine about the sultry sweetness of his expression, a resignation, a closeness to history, a somnolence brought about by years of intense heat, a low opinion of the value of tangible things, a weary exasperation with the ephemeral.

When he spoke, it was in a voice which was scarcely audible, clogged with dust and black tobacco. His words were formed delicately out of wheezy gusts of breath and sounded as though they came from far away. Plageot couldn't help liking the fellow. He had substance.

"Remind me of some of the other names I used," he said suddenly.

Plageot obliged. "Vladimir Ilikov, René Sabouréau, Wolfgang Tichy, Antal Solomon, Count Napoléon de Souci . . ."

At the mention of his last name, he broke into frank laughter,

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which was transformed almost at once into painful coughing. At length the fit subsided, and he looked up at Plageot, exhausted but dimly amused.

"I was always at my worst when I tried to be aristocratic," he wheezed. "I could never think of a name. Napoléon de Souci . . . What an idiotic idea! The Organisation ordered me to infiltrate the royal family of Saxony from the inside in order to facilitate the murder of one of its members. We were aiming low in those days. They saw through me, of course. I no sooner presented my card than I was rushed away and deported. I didn't look like a Count Napoléon de Souci, you understand. Come to think of it, I can't imagine what a Count Napoléon de Souci would look like." He grew more serious. "No, I was at my best, at my most dangerous, when I was a man of the people."

"Dangerous?" asked Plageot. "And yet, looking through your file, I cannot find the evidence of a single crime you have committed. Certainly no murder. Always you have been arrested on suspicion."

"I was never lucky in France," said Zvoinitch, with a sigh.

"Then why did you stay here? You seem to have no family ties here, and certainly no ties of blood."

"I love France," murmured Zvoinitch. "Unless you kick me out, I will never leave."

In spite of himself, Plageot was moved. He closed the file and lit a Gauloise cigarette. "Very well," he said, "let me recapitulate. I cannot reach any decision unless the problem is clear in my own mind. I took over this bureau yesterday, and you have consistently indicated by your insinuations that I don't know my way around yet. This I understand as well as you do. But put yourself in my shoes for a moment. A man of eighty-four enters my office—"

"Eighty-five."

"Eighty-five; I beg your pardon. Far be it from me to shorten your life. You enter my office, supporting yourself on two sticks, and announce that you are a violent and notorious assassin. Because I am polite by nature, I ask you to sit down. You do so with evident relief, having negotiated four flights of stairs. Then you produce a copy of this morning's *Aurore*, in which the imminent arrival of the Imam of the Hejjaz is announced, in order to promote better understanding between the French people and his people. I ask you what this fact has to do with your visit. You express surprise and tell me that my predecessor, Monsieur Latille, would have understood. Since I insist, you

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explain to me that the life of the Imam is in danger. I become interested and ask you if you have any information which leads you to believe this. You smile pityingly and tell me that you may be tempted to kill him if I do not deport you for one week to Corsica. My dear fellow, have you any idea where the Hejjaz is?"

"It doesn't matter where it is," replied the old man. "I am against all autocrats, and the people of that unfortunate land, wherever it is, deserve to be liberated. No despot is safe while I am alive."

"Tell me," asked Plageot, "what would my predecessor, Monsieur Latille, have done?"

"There was no argument with him," replied Zvoinitch. "He recognised the danger which we constitute to the guests of the Republic. He would have signed the authorisation at once, and we would have been on the plane tonight."

"Tonight?" Plageot was frankly surprised. "But the Imam does not arrive until the day after tomorrow."

"Monsieur Latille was not one to take risks where desperate men are involved."

"I see. By 'we' I presume you mean yourself and your five colleagues?"

"Yes."

"And where are your five friends?"

"They are all packed and ready to go."

"How is that?"

"When we read of the visit of the Imam in this morning's paper we held a meeting, and I was sent as a delegate representing our group."

Plageot took out a pencil. "Would you mind giving me the names of your friends?"

"Is that necessary? Monsieur Latille—"

"Monsieur Latille is no longer here," Plageot said sharply.

"Very well. Asen Popoff, of the Bulgarian Nihilist International. Yahuda Achron, of the Jewish branch. Professor Semyon Gurko, of the Ukrainian Separatist Nihilist Union. Lazar Perlesco, of the Nihilist Centre of the Banat. And Madame Perlesco, better known in nihilist circles as Rosa Liechtenstein."

"Well," said Plageot, "I can't give you an answer today."

Zvoinitch made no attempt to disguise his annoyance. "Tomorrow may be too late," he said.

"That is a risk we will have to take."

Zvoinitch rose with difficulty, seeming to think that he was more impressive at his full five feet eight. "You are young," he

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declared darkly. "Anyone who is young in charge of a government department must be considered promising. Your career may well be ruined by your shortsightedness."

"Do you know what I think?" Plageot answered. "I think you should see a doctor."

"Is that so? Before long you may find yourself in the position of being seen by a doctor."

"Are you threatening me now?"

"I threaten anyone who stands in my way."

He tucked his miserable suitcase under one arm, took a stick in either hand, and hobbled to the door.

"It may interest you to know," Zvoinitch whispered, "that the Imam of the Hejjaz arrives on Air France, Flight 178, from Baghdad at 7.48 on Wednesday morning. He is staying at the Hotel Raphael. He leaves on Sunday for Marseilles on the *Train Bleu*. Guard him well.

He was gone. Plageot stubbed out his cigarette in irritation. He rang for Mademoiselle Pelbec, his assistant. After a moment she entered. She was one of those devoted functionaries who haunt French ministries, walking hither and thither with bits of paper, for ever stamping something. An open pair of scissors hung from her belt on a chain. Her blouse was home-made and ill-fitting enough for one strap of her brassière to be permanently visible, gathered with the strap of her slip in the loop of a gigantic safety-pin. Her hair was dull red, her mouth twitched incessantly, and she had no eyebrows.

"You rang," she announced, and made it sound like an accusation.

She had been eight years with Monsieur Latille, and she resented his retirement.

"Mademoiselle Pelbec," Plageot said, "what do you know of a man called Zvoinitch, who says he is a nihilist?"

Mademoiselle Pelbec became guarded and seemed to be choosing her words with some caution.

"Well, I know Monsieur Latille considered him a rather dangerous character," she replied.

"If he is so dangerous, why was he not deported?"

"Oh, dear me, no," Mademoiselle Pelbec blurted, and then steadied herself. "While Monsieur Latille considered him dangerous, he did not consider him as dangerous as he considered himself, if you follow my meaning."

"Frankly, no. From one meeting, I consider him a harmless crank."

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"You mean you are not sending him to Corsica?" Mademoiselle Pelbec asked in horror.

"Why should I?"

"Well, he never reports without good reason. The relationship between him and Monsieur Latille was quite remarkable. For as long as I remember, Monsieur Latille never had to send for them. They would report of their own accord whenever they read in the papers that anyone of any importance was visiting Paris. It was an extraordinary example of co-operation between the potential criminal and the potential pursuer. If all criminals were as public-spirited as the six of them, there would be no more crime."

"Precisely," said Plageot dryly. "I believe them to be utterly harmless."

"Is any of us utterly harmless?" asked Mademoiselle Pelbec. "They never killed anyone in France, true, but in Macedonia their record is terrible."

"How do you know?"

"Monsieur Latille told me so."

Plageot grunted. "There's no evidence of it here," he said.

"Monsieur Latille wouldn't have invented such information. Why should he?"

"I wonder. That will be all, Mademoiselle Pelbec."

She left on her dignity, muttering about upstarts and ingratitude.

Plageot stared out of the window, where a summer day was fading. Then he called another department of the Sûreté Nationale. In reply to his question about the Imam's arrival, he was told that the potentate was due on Air France, Flight 264, from Geneva at 9.12 on Wednesday morning, and that he would be staying as a guest of the President of the Republic. Smiling grimly, he replaced the receiver. He prepared to dismiss the matter from his mind momentarily when the phone rang. The man at the other end told him that he had been given the wrong information and that the Imam would not be staying at the Elysée but at the Hotel Raphael.

Plageot cursed. "But tell me," he asked, "is he flying in from Geneva and not from Baghdad?"

"The information I gave you about the flight is correct," said the voice.

"And where does the Imam go after Paris?"

"Monte Carlo."

"Monte Carlo, not Marseilles."

"No, no, Monte Carlo. The Imam is coming here to better the

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lot of his underprivileged people, but he is incalculably wealthy himself and likes to gamble."

Plageot smiled. "And I presume," he added, "that he will fly to Nice and then proceed by car."

"No," said the voice, "he is booked all the way on the *Train Bleu*."

"What? Thank you." Plageot hung up and thought.

Two of the facts supplied by the old man were right, two were wrong. A policeman's function was to be suspicious, and yet it was far easier to suspect someone trying to allay suspicion than it was to suspect someone trying to attract it. It would be dreadful if the Imam did perish, blown to pieces by the traditional bunch of flowers containing the infernal machine in its scented bosom. His conscience would be indelibly marked if that should happen; he could never face Mademoiselle Pelbec again, that was sure. Damn Zvoinitch! With all his clumsiness, he knew what he was doing, setting little balls of doubt rolling. He was just too sinister not to be ridiculous, yet not ridiculous enough to be quite harmless. Plageot called for the files of the people Zvoinitch had named as his collaborators. Their police records were remarkably similar. All had multitudinous aliases.

Plageot made some rapid calculations on his pad and came to the remarkable conclusion that their combined ages came to 508 years, Yahuda Achron being the youngest of the group at seventy-nine, Madame Perlesco the oldest at ninety-two.

It was more and more disturbing, more and more absurd. There was only one key to the mystery—Latille. Plageot searched his diary for the number and telephoned Latille at home.

"Hello, is Monsieur Latille in?" he asked.

A woman's voice seemed hesitant.

"Who is speaking?"

"Ambroise Plageot. Is that Madame Latille?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Madame. This is Plageot, your husband's successor. You may remember me from the little party the day before yesterday to celebrate your husband's retirement. It was I who was selected to present him with the commemorative inkwell."

"Indeed I remember you, Monsieur. The inkwell is on my mantelpiece. It is very beautiful, as indeed was your speech."

"I flatter myself that I chose my words with some felicity. Is your husband in, Madame?"

"Just a second," she said.

Monsieur Latille came to the phone. "Hello, Plageot. How's everything at the office, old man?"

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"That's just it, Latille. I have a question which only you can answer. Would you have a moment to see me?"

"Can't you tell me now?"

"No."

There was a pause at the other end. "Oh, very well. Come around at once, if you insist."

"Thank you," Plageot said, already feeling more a master of the situation.

Plageot was unmarried, but he had a mistress, who might as well have been his wife, because he was not entirely faithful to her. This happened to be her birthday. He called her. "Annik," he said in his most authoritative voice, "I will be late—three-quarters of an hour. What's that, you're dressed to go out? So much the better; then you won't keep me waiting when I do arrive."

He put on his rakish black hat and left the office for the day.

"My dear Plageot," said Monsieur Latille, entering his humble drawing-room, "please excuse the disorder, but we are leaving tomorrow morning for Dinard." He was a colourful personality, this Latille, with his unkempt grey hair, his tiny goatee, and his watery blue eyes, more of an artist, to look at, than a functionary. Plageot, so accurate, so dogmatic, so razor-sharp, felt awkward in the presence of such floridity.

"I realise you must be very busy. I can only stay for a moment in any case, so I will come straight to the point. It is about a certain Zvoinitch."

Monsieur Latille lost his geniality and sat heavily.

"Yes," he said, "I was afraid you would ask me about him. When I opened this morning's paper and saw that the Imam of the Hejjaz was arriving tomorrow, it spoiled my day. I became fretful with anticipation of the worst. I hoped to get away before the storm broke."

Plageot sat down also. "But what is the mystery?" he asked. "Either the fellow is dangerous or he is not. It must be a relatively simple question to decide."

"It is far from simple," Latille said sadly. "I feel at the moment like the head cashier of a bank, trusted by all, who is suddenly discovered to have embezzled millions of francs."

"Why do you feel like that?" demanded Plageot.

"Because—because I could never make up my mind whether these superannuated revolutionaries were dangerous or not. Eventually, I could stand the uncertainty no longer, and I gave them the benefit of the doubt."

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No other contemporary theatrical figure has worked in so many different fields, and succeeded, as a playwright, actor, director, writer, and wit, so brilliantly as Peter Ustinov. Outstanding screen performances have brought him international fame. In London and New York his plays triumph. It is not surprising that a man of such vitality should turn his hand to fiction. His first collection of stories, called *Add a Dash of Pity*, appeared in 1959; a novel, *The Loser*, in 1961. A second collection, *The Frontiers of the Sea*, from which *The Assassins* was taken, is published this autumn. Three new Ustinov stories appear in forthcoming *Argosy* issues, tales as witty, compassionate and exciting as their author.

"You mean that you acceded to their request and sent them to Corsica without due reason?"

"Precisely."

Plageot's manner became very stiff and self-righteous. "You realise that you utilised the taxpayers' money in these caprices of yours, Latille?"

"Of course I realise it, my dear fellow, although I can't pretend that it caused me much anguish. The end result of most of the taxpayers' money is far less charitable and far less useful. Look at the amount of it which was poured into the Maginot Line, and a lot of good that did."

"If everyone thought as you, there would be chaos!"

"There is chaos in any case, my dear Plageot, not because all men think like me but because all men think differently from each other. As Voltaire wisely said, it is up to each one of us to cultivate his own garden. Two bits of sound common sense placed in juxtaposition can easily lead to chaos. About that we can do nothing. All we can do is to keep our house in order."

Plageot rose and paced the floor agitatedly. "I did not come here," he said, "to indulge in a metaphysical discussion."

"No," replied Latille reasonably, "you came here to ask if

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six old assassins are dangerous or not. I give you my answer. I don't know."

"You surprise me, Latille, and you shock me. Now I understand why Zvoinitch told me he had a very agreeable working arrangement with you."

Latille smiled. "Did he say that? That was very kind of him, if a little tactless, seeing that he hadn't got your measure yet."

Plageot stopped in his tracks. "What do you mean by that?" he exploded. "Are you now attempting to justify your actions?"

"I don't think they need justification. Up to yesterday your department was my department. I ran it for eight years, and I don't regret my decision in regard to these men. All I dreaded was the day on which I would have to explain myself. There is a difference between explanation and justification."

"There is not time to dwell on fine points of interpretation," cried Plageot. "Explain yourself, then."

Latille spoke softly and with amusement.

"I remember the first time Zvoinitch came to my office. He was called Zbigniew at the time. It was in 1946, when Paris was brimful of Allied generals. At that time, I was struck by his honesty. He told me he couldn't resist making attempts on the lives of foreign notables. I thought I might send him to a psychiatrist, but somehow it seemed a little eccentric to try to cure the foibles of a man over seventy, which had hardened, according to his file, into an ineradicable habit. Had he been a youth, I would not have hesitated. In view of his age, however, I decided to dispatch him to Corsica. Admittedly, I became a little suspicious when he suddenly produced as many as five friends, all suffering from the same peculiar temptation. Still, the last thing we wanted was a dead Allied diplomat or general on our hands, especially at a time when we were doing our utmost to make our battered country attractive for tourists. After a while, a degree of stability was re-established, and these old people were allowed to return to France.

"Then someone like Molotov came to Paris—I forget who, exactly—but suddenly the place was teeming with Russian security officers with the most alarmingly comprehensive lists of exactly whom they wished removed. When they used the word 'removed', I suspect that they meant a more irrevocable course of action than mere transportation to Corsica. In my eagerness to show the Russians that their lists were far from complete I ostentatiously sent our six friends abroad once again. I didn't have to round them up. As usual, they reported of their own accord, and during the presence of General Serov in my office I

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was able to demonstrate to the Russian that opposition to the régime is civic-minded in a democracy.

"When Tito arrived, the same procedure was repeated, and it happened again when Adenauer appeared. Then one day they turned up for no particular reason. I asked them to what I owed the pleasure of their visit—and it was a pleasure, Plageot, I promise you. They combined the qualities of emotion and of ridicule, as good clowns do. They were, in short, a relief from the dreary parade of grim, ugly, charmless people who engage our attentions day in and day out.

"They explained, without batting an eyelid, that the Shah of Persia was due in France. I laughed. 'You're not going to pretend,' I said, 'that you wish to assassinate the poor defenceless Shah. He has troubles of his own, finding out how to drag oil from the soil, without any more trouble from you.'

"Zvoinitch took over at this point. He is their spokesman. His eyes gleamed with a cunning so transparent it was touching. 'Look at Madame Perlesco's file,' he said, 'and see what happened in the late summer of 1912.' I did so. She had been arrested in Isfahan and deported to France at the request of the Persian government for consistently shouting insults at the royal house in public.

" 'The Persians must have been appallingly sensitive,' I observed.

" 'Shrewd, shrewd,' he corrected. 'They recognised danger when they saw it. In those countries it is not the practice to conduct assassinations personally. Instead, you incite the mob, and they do the work collectively.'

"The story was incredible but expounded so ingeniously, and they had packed their few belongings so painstakingly, that I gave in.

"Some nine months later, they really went too far. They came to my office, all packed and ready to go, on the pretext that the Prince of Monte Carlo was due. I told them to go home. They insisted that the consequences of my decision would be dire. I replied that they were abusing my kindness. Zvoinitch suddenly brandished a huge pistol of Arabic design, which he produced from his voluminous pocket.

" 'Have you a licence for that?' I asked him. In moments of peril I always find courage in being light-hearted. He answered that the Nihilist International had no licence for anything and that this formed part of their general policy.

"I began to laugh. This seemed to enrage Zvoinitch, who pointed his pistol out of the window and pulled the trigger.

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There was a resounding report which set up an intense singing in my ears. Unfortunately, the dramatic effect was somewhat spoiled by Perlesco, who shouted, 'Fool, there goes the last of the gunpowder!'

"I rose and pointed to the door with a trembling finger.

" 'Out! Out!' I yelled. 'And never come back!'

"They left in confusion, just as some people working in neighbouring offices came in to see what had happened.

"When it was announced some time later that the Emperor of Ethiopia was about to pay us a visit, I half expected them to return, but the days passed and they did not come. I was troubled by remorse, Plageot. Perhaps I myself was growing older and could sense the yawning cave of retirement before me, ever closer, ever closer. Whatever the reason, I felt myself the prey to a terrible compassion for these old idiots. By throwing them out of my office, I began to sense the kind of guilt I associate with kicking a dog or stealing a sweet from a child. In itself my gesture had been unimportant, but I suspected that it had assumed a vast importance to them, since their world was so constricted. I prayed for them to return so that I could clear my conscience.

"Then, only a few hours before the arrival of the Negus at Orly Airport, the door to my office opened tentatively. It was Zvoinitch! I leaped to my feet and blurted out, 'My God, where have you been? I thought I'd have to come and get you!'

"Zvoinitch smiled feebly. 'Then we can go to Corsica?'

" 'Here are your papers,' I said with a sigh of relief.

"That was the last I saw of them."

Plageot stared at Latille as though he had just watched some military secrets being sold.

"One thing you have not explained," he snorted. "Why do these people wish to go to Corsica? Is it the meeting place of the Nihilist International?"

"Oh, no," said Latille, with a smile of charming frankness. "I don't believe the Nihilist International exists any more. No, I think they like the climate of Corsica. They regard it as a vacation. A vacation we pay for."

Plageot hovered on the brink of physical disintegration. He was purple with outrage.

"This is the most scandalous sequence of events which has ever come to my notice," he roared. "You are a victim of your own weakness and sentimentality, Latille, and because of your approaching dotage you project your self-pity on to a group of harmless nitwits who—"

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Latille held up a hand to stay the avalanche.

"Harmless?" he flashed. "If that pistol had been aimed at a man, it would have taken his head off. They do not lack imagination to the extent that you do, Plageot. They may be mad, but they are imaginative. At this moment they may be seated in some garret, concocting some diabolical device in order to dispatch the Imam of the Hejjaz—not, Plageot, because they have anything against the Imam, but because it is their way of telling you that it is time for them to go to Corsica."

"Arrest them, then! Throw them into prison! Teach them a lesson!"

"That's your way, isn't it? Prison. It's still at the public expense, Plageot. It may be cheaper at the Cherche-Midi, but the food they eat is paid for by the taxpayer. The people of France must pay for either my tolerance or your intolerance."

"Deport them, then."

"Where to? Who would take them? My dear boy, you have a very low opinion of France and of her traditions."

"France is not a charitable organisation!"

"France is the home of the cultivated mind. You're so ambitious that you will rise to the top of the tree and scatter the seeds of your personal misery far and wide. Thank God I am not your contemporary."

Plageot trembled. His mouth worked meaninglessly and his eyes stared. "What the hell are you talking about?" he cried.

"Why was I so civilised in regard to these curious characters? Because I am happy in myself, and he who is happy is generous. He wishes to give others the secret. I have been married for forty-one years, and no cross word has ever passed between my wife and myself. We had humour and resilience. I knew I would never rise to the top, and I was reconciled to my mediocrity. I could even joke about it when the occasion demanded it. Our daughters are not very beautiful. They have my wife's face and my figure. Consequently, they found husbands who married them for the most subtle of their qualities, and they are all as happy as we are. When my wife drove our car into a tree last year, I welcomed the opportunity of walking again. There is some advantage to every disaster."

"What has this to do with me or with the efficient administration of the department?"

"Everything," said Latille. "You are a thoroughly miserable character. Your humour is sarcastic, as though all your thoughts turned rancid in the filter of your mind. Head of a department in your early forties, you are deemed one of the most promising

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men in the police, and it is to be expected that you will end up as prefect of Lyon, or Marseilles, at least, making life difficult down there with your dreary little pettifogging decisions. Or else you may end up as resident in one of our minor possessions, confusing the natives and passing the time by altering the traffic regulations from day to day. I know your sort. Life is a dossier, memory is a file, ambition is a badge, love is a regulation. You are a bachelor. Why? Because you are selfish. You need women more than you like them, and you like them more than you love them, and you love them more than you can love one of them. At the moment you are living with a second-rate actress. Again, why? Because you have reached a grade in which it is *de rigueur* to live with a second-rate actress. You never take a spiritual risk. You are dead. You see what you want to see, feel what you want to feel, and your charm goes about as deep as eau-de-Cologne. Mind you, I only say this because I like you. Unlike those unfortunate nihilists, you are still redeemable. We can make a man of you yet."

Just then Madame Latille entered. She was of surprising ugliness, but her smile radiated warmth and amusement. "Jules," she chided, "you haven't offered our guest a glass of port!"

Plageot, sobered by the presence of a lady, said, "I regret, Latille, that I will have to ask for a thorough investigation of your activities and bring this case to the attention of the prefect."

Latille shrugged his shoulders and grinned sadly. "Do as you wish, but don't be surprised if the Imam is blown sky-high while you are engaged in your corrective measures and the Arab world rises against us in vengeance simply because you were dealing with matters of greater importance."

Plageot stormed out and proceeded to a most unhappy birthday celebration with his mistress. Annik did what she could to cheer up her lover, but all he could do now was to think of her as a second-rate actress. He argued over the bill with the waiter, the proprietor was called, the car wouldn't start, and when they reached his apartment, a fuse had blown out. Annik dressed in a brief, transparent pair of black pyjamas and lay around on her pink sheets, exuding desire, but he sat grimly on a chair, facing the wall.

Suddenly he phoned the Sûreté. "Inspector Bréval," he said, "are you on duty tonight? This is Plageot. Eloignement. There are six people I want followed. This is urgent, top priority. I will give you their names and addresses."

When he had finished his conversation, he lay down on the bed

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and closed his eyes. Soon he was asleep. His dreams were peopled with murderers. Everyone carried some lethal instrument. Mademoiselle Pelbec tried to stab him with her scissors. He couldn't open a door without finding Latille there, followed by a battalion of happy and hideous daughters. When he went to the cubbyholes to fetch his mail, he saw that many tiny naked women were filed there, one for every grade. The prefect's cubbyhole contained one of the most distinguished actresses in France, six inches tall. "*Bonjour*, Plageot," she said with a captivating smile. "One day you will be a prefect and you will inherit me." He awoke, covered with perspiration and on the verge of tears.

"Curse Latille!" he cried aloud.

The next morning two detectives were waiting to see him.

"Well?" he asked. "Did you find any of them?"

"No, sir," replied the detective.

"Fools!" Plageot brought his fist down on the desk.

"With all due respect, we are not to blame for the absence of the suspects."

"No, no, of course not. I didn't sleep very well. I am nervous."

The day passed slowly. Plageot could do no work. At four o'clock in the afternoon, a phone call from His Excellency Djamil Al-haroun Ibn-Ibrahim Al-Salaoui, chief economic adviser to His Serenity the Imam of the Hejjaz, announced the fact that a threatening letter had been received by the delegation in Geneva on the eve of their departure.

Apparently the letter, post-marked Soissons, was brief and to the point. It said, *Death Awaits You in Paris.* There was no signature, but an amateurish picture of a decapitated head and a gory scimitar.

In a way, Plageot was relieved. Now there was no more ambiguity, no more fear of looking ridiculous. He informed all relevant departments of the nature of the threat. At six o'clock a man walking with the aid of two sticks was arrested but released after an hour of questioning. He turned out to be a retired colonel with a glorious record. He also intended to sue the police. The operations proceeded under an evil star.

The Geneva police called at eight to report the arrival of a menacing telegram at the hotel of the Arabian delegation. It read: WE MEANT WHAT WE SAID IN THE LETTER. THE SCIMITAR OF VENGEANCE IS POISED. It had been sent from Bordeaux. Bordeaux? Plageot examined the map of France. Soissons was quite far from Paris, Bordeaux much farther. This must mean that

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the organisation was larger than he thought. He looked at his watch and became nervous. Time was running short.

At eight o'clock the prefect, Monsieur Vagny, held a conference, which Plageot attended.

"Gentlemen," the prefect said, gravely, "we are taking every precaution to ensure the safety of the Imam of the Hejjaz. Obviously what I tell you here is of the utmost secrecy. At the last moment, the Imam and his party will be switched from the Air France plane which was to have taken them to Orly on to a Swissair plane which will land at Le Bourget. The Swissair plane lands ten minutes earlier. From there a Citroën car bearing a false Imam will proceed directly to the Hotel Raphael, while the real Imam will go in a Delage by a more circuitous route. The floor waiters on the second floor of the Raphael have all been replaced by policemen. The lift operator will be Detective Vaubourgoin, one of our best men. We will infiltrate the kitchen staff with our lads. If the assassins strike, they will find us waiting. We cannot afford to underestimate the threat to the Imam's life or overestimate the importance of his survival to our country. That will be all, gentlemen. To your posts."

Just before the Air France plane was due to leave Geneva it was searched by the Swiss police. A bomb with a timing device was found aboard, gaily ticking away under a seat. Most of the passengers had already taken their seats when one of them, a distinguished gentleman of swarthy appearance, collapsed. He was taken off with suspected appendicitis. It was under his seat that the bomb was found. He was promptly arrested by the Swiss authorities and turned out to be a member of an Arabian secret society in favour of a return to power of the Imam's deposed uncle, a dissipated gentleman who lived in Rome. The French were informed of these findings when the Swissair plane was already very close to Paris. The Swiss also added that, while the would-be murderer was still believed to have been a *bona fide* appendectomy patient, he had used the phone in the airport clinic and was talking agitatedly in Arabic when the police broke in to arrest him. He may have realised that the Imam would not be a passenger on that plane and may have warned the other members of his conspiracy about this.

The French police prowling through Orly Airport noticed a suspicious group of Arabs who were drinking coffee nervously at the bar and chatting furtively. Plageot walked up and down with Inspector Lagnon but saw no trace of the nihilists.

"Is the plane late?" he asked suddenly.

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"Didn't you hear?" Lagnon replied surreptitiously. "They got a message through just now. They found a bomb aboard. The plane won't be coming at all. They caught the man, but they think he had time to warn the other members of his organisation that the Imam would land at Le Bourget."

"What?" cried Plageot. "Why didn't you tell me?" He ran out, waved to his car, and set out in the direction of Le Bourget at full speed.

He arrived at Le Bourget just as the Imam and his party were sweeping out of the plane in a flurry of white, their dark glasses sparkling as brightly as their teeth.

Inspector de Valde met Plageot. "It's all right. They've just phoned through from Orly. They've captured all the assassins. Eight of them. Arabs."

"That's what they think!" cried Plageot. There among the crowd was Zvoinitch with five old people. "Arrest those people!"

"What for?" asked the baffled de Valde.

"Those are your assassins!"

"But, I tell you, they telephoned—"

"Do as I say!"

Discreetly, the six nihilists were rounded up and bustled away.

Zvoinitch looked triumphant. "Oh, please let me hear the thing explode," he pleaded with Plageot, as the little group stood on the pavement.

"What thing?" Plageot screamed, shaking Zvoinitch mercilessly by the lapels.

Zvoinitch rapped him painfully on the knuckles with one of his sticks. "The bomb," he said.

"Where is it?" Plageot was nursing his hand.

"Will you send us to Corsica?"

Plageot caught sight of the Imam and his party approaching their car. Customs formalities had been dispensed with in the interests of hospitality.

"Very well," he hissed, "but where is it?"

"Under the rear wheel of the car. When the car moves off—*pouff!*" Zvoinitch made an eloquent gesture.

Like lightning, Plageot ran off and dived under the Imam's car. Running madly with a black box in his hand, followed by two of his men, he threw himself into the gentlemen's convenience. To the consternation of the old attendant who stood there, he filled a sink with water and dropped the black box into it.

"Get out!" he cried to the attendant, and to his men he gasped, "Cordon off this area. Bring the bomb-removal people."

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On the way back to Paris, he gave in to dreams of glory. He heard the congratulations of ministers, read the envy in the eyes of his colleagues, and was tinglingly surprised at his own incredible courage.

Half an hour later, he sat at his desk. Napoleon could not have felt more sure of himself when he seized the crown from the Pope's hands. The six assassins were lined up before him. He did not offer them seats. It was better for them to stand. He had called in de Valde to witness his triumph.

"What was the name of your contact in Geneva?" he asked.

"Geneva? We have no contact in Geneva," Zvoinitch said.

"And in Soissons?"

"Nor in Soissons."

"And in Bordeaux?"

"No."

"You're lying."

Zvoinitch shrugged his shoulders. He didn't care for boors.

"Perhaps the name of Mohammed-Bin-Mohammed will refresh you memories?" Plageot barked.

The assassins looked at each other, then shook their heads. "It's not a name any of us have ever used," said Zvoinitch.

"You choose to joke," said Plageot with an unpleasant inflection. "I advise you to take this examination more seriously, for your own sakes. The game's up, you know. Mohammed-Bin-Mohammed is arrested. He has confessed."

"I don't understand why you are asking all these meaningless questions," Zvoinitch remarked gently. "You promised us we could go to Corsica."

"Corsica?" Plageot laughed harshly. "I think you are more likely to end up in a shadier place."

"But you promised!" Zvoinitch was indignant.

"Shut up!"

There was silence, and the receding echo of Plageot's rudeness.

"I will tell you what occurred, since you refuse to tell me," Plageot murmured. "You were expecting the Imam at Orly, but we forestalled you. Your contact in Geneva, Mohammed-Bin-Mohammed, entered the plane as a passenger and carefully placed his bomb under his seat. Then he looked around and realised that the Imam would not be travelling on the craft. He quickly feigned illness and was carried to the airport clinic. While the nurse was out of the room, he telephoned you at a prearranged number and had time to tell you to go to Le Bourget before the Swiss authorities arrested him. You moved quickly

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to Le Bourget with the bomb you had prepared in case the attempt in the airplane failed. Quickly identifying the car destined to carry the Imam by the quantity of policemen surrounding it, you stooped to tie your shoe and placed the bomb under the back wheel, and then retired amid the crowd to watch the results of your lethal handiwork. Can you deny this?"

De Valde looked at Plageot in admiration. For lucidity, for shrewdness, for grasp, this assessment of a situation would be hard to equal. It was a model of police work.

"We went to Le Bourget because we guessed that the Imam would land there," said Zvoinitch.

"Lies!" snapped Plageot. "The other day you told me the Imam would land at Orly in an Air France plane."

"Did I? I was guessing. One usually forgets a guess. That's why honesty is the best policy."

"It is indeed. You even mentioned the flight number."

"I made it up, knowing that you would forget it. As far as Air France goes, that was in the papers."

"But the Air France morning flight from Geneva does not go to Le Bourget."

"How was I to know that?" Zvoinitch replied. "I relied on my instinct. If I had been wrong, we would have found our way into the Hotel Raphael."

"Ah! At last a confession! And how did you know about the Hotel Raphael?"

"Oh, that's easy," said Zvoinitch. "The Hotel Lancaster puts out its refuse bins very early every morning. If you get there in good time, you'll find the reports of the celebrity service almost every day. They're a little late by the time we get them, but they're good enough for us. They announce imminent arrivals on occasion."

Plageot smiled grimly. "Never underestimate the ingenuity of the trained criminal mind," he said to de Valde.

"Remarkable," muttered de Valde.

Just then Monsieur Kellerer of the police laboratory entered. He wore a white lab coat.

"Aha!" said Plageot. "Now for the incriminating evidence!"

"Are you sure this is the correct article?" asked the perplexed Kellerer.

"Positive," said de Valde. "I supervised its removal from the sink in the men's toilet myself and transported it here."

"What's wrong with it?" Plageot demanded.

Kellerer opened it. "It's empty," he said. "It's just an empty box."

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"But that wire leading from it," Plageot stuttered, "does it signify nothing?"

"Nothing at all. It's just soldered on to the outside."

"Could it not have contained something which dissolved under the water?"

"Out of the question."

De Valde began laughing, at first softly, then hysterically.

Plageot's irritated question, "What are you laughing at, de Valde?" only made matters worse.

Kellerer felt that the laughter would be contagious and prudently left with the evidence, a smile growing on his face.

"For God's sake, de Valde, pull yourself together!" yelled Plageot.

"The idea . . . of your breaking the world's record for the two-hundred metres . . . in order to make an empty box harmless . . . by immersing it under water in the gents' convenience. Oh, it's too good!" de Valde sobbed, holding on to the side of the desk.

"De Valde! Return to your office!"

But it was too late. The laughter was sweeping like a forest fire through the assassins. De Valde left with difficulty. As Plageot stood before his desk, tears of rage filled his eyes.

"Silence! Silence! I demand silence!" he bellowed like a child in a tantrum. "I shall arrest you," he announced, when the noise had calmed down a little.

"On what grounds?" asked Zvoinitch.

"I'll—I'll find grounds . . ."

"Presumably we'll stand trial, whatever grounds you find. The courtroom would be an ideal place for us to ventilate this story, perhaps even to immortalise it."

"Are you blackmailing me?"

"Not at all," said Zvoinitch. "Blackmail entails a financial transaction. If we have to go to court, we will have to swear to tell the truth. I am only threatening to do exactly what I have to do on oath in any case."

Plageot looked around like a madman.

"All right," he said. "I'll send you away, but it'll be to the Sahara, to the Chad—Ubangi-Shari, where the heat is unbearable."

"Monsieur Plageot," Zvoinitch replied calmly, "we are very conscious of the fact that every time we are sent away from France it is at the public expense. If you wreak your vengeance on us by sending us to Equatorial Africa, it will not be we who suffer so much as the poor taxpayer. The fare is considerably more expensive. I should hate to think that our good-natured

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romp would end up as a burden on the man in the street, simply because your feelings are hurt."

These particular sentiments, expressed with such solicitous nobility, were too much for Plageot, who just sat down and wept.

After a moment, he rang for Mademoiselle Pelbec.

"The documents, Mademoiselle," he said wearily, "for Corsica."

"Here they are," replied Mademoiselle Pelbec, laying them on his desk.

"You had them ready?"

"Oh, yes, since I saw in the papers that the Imam was arriving."

"I am back-dating them to yesterday, before the Imam's arrival, for the record," Plageot said, handing them the documents.

The situation was delicate. The assassins just nodded politely and left, not even deigning to express their thanks for fear of arousing another storm.

As Plageot sat alone, his soul was a desert. He heard laughter from the office next door, and he could not conceive that the reason for it might be other than the story of his disgrace on its journey round the vast agglomeration of buildings. He grew grim, and his mouth set into a powerful and melancholy curve. Such things are sent to try a man, to temper his steel. With a painful sob still in his heart, he gazed at the sky and knew that he would go far.

"Mademoiselle Pelbec," he called militarily, "bring me the deportation files nineteen and twenty-one, at once!"

It is only in fairy stories that a chastening experience makes a lasting difference in a man's character. Monsieur Plageot became, if anything, harder and more disagreeable. He used every opportunity to discredit both de Valde and Kellerer without really analysing his reasons for hating them. His relations with Annik were cold, contrived, and artificial: when he wished to be hurtful, he called her a second-rate actress. Only in one regard did the incident of the six assassins affect him. Knowing that they would never retire and that he would have to wait for them to die, he never again opened his morning paper without a sickening trepidation.

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Next month in Argosy: another sparkling tale from the talented pen of Peter Ustinov

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shelved!

A light-hearted version of life in the library . . . by MADDOCKS

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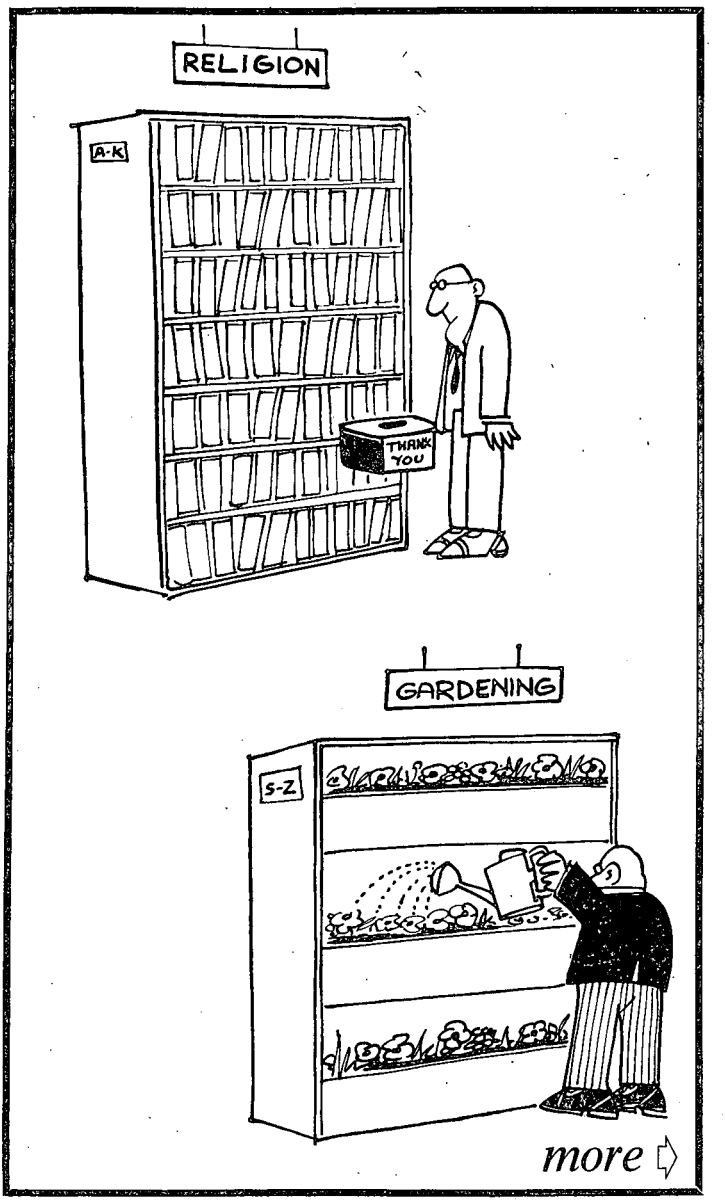

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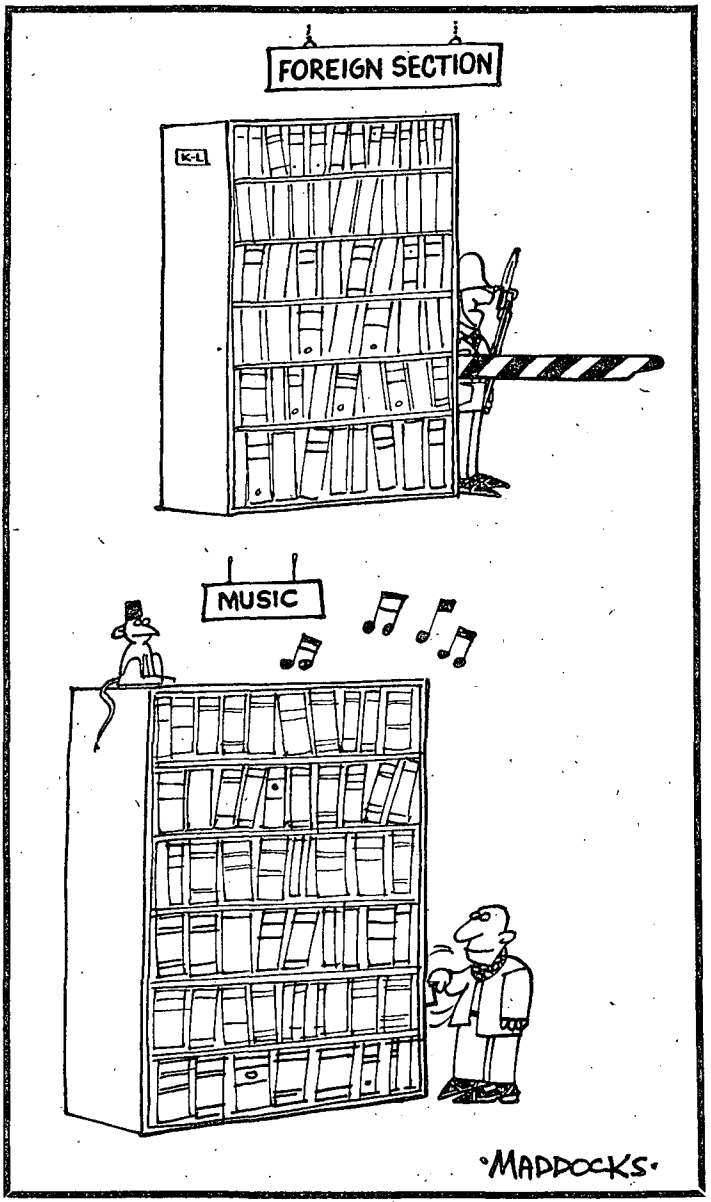

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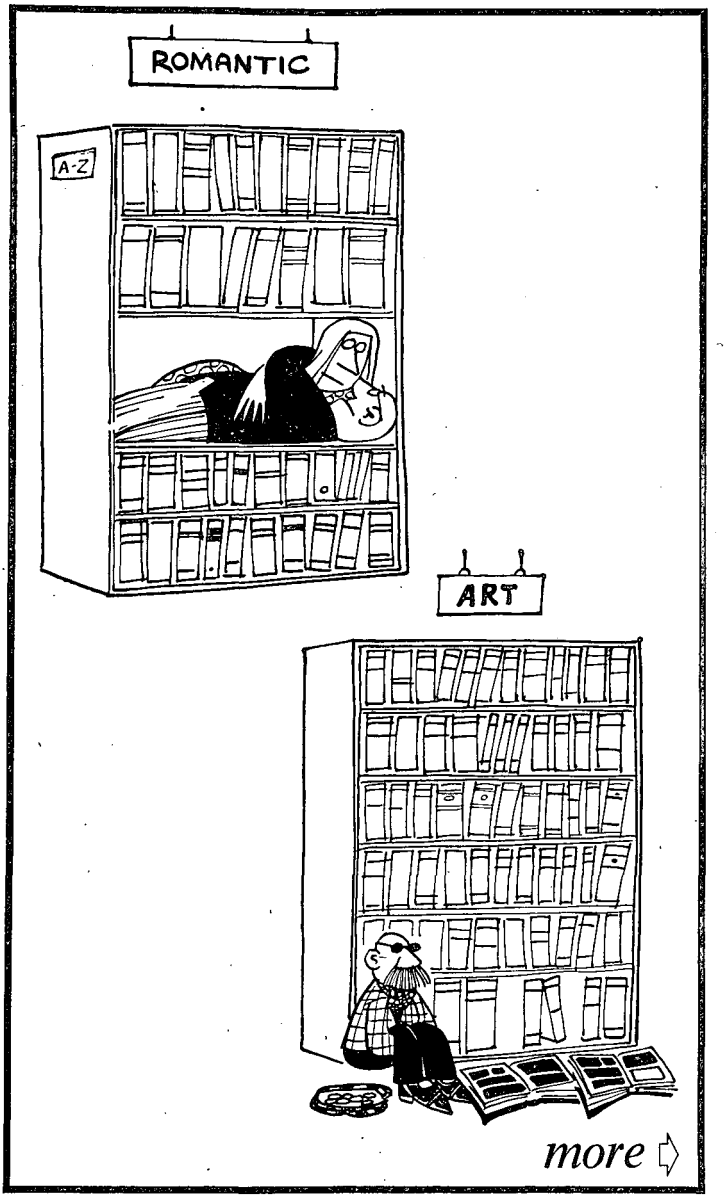

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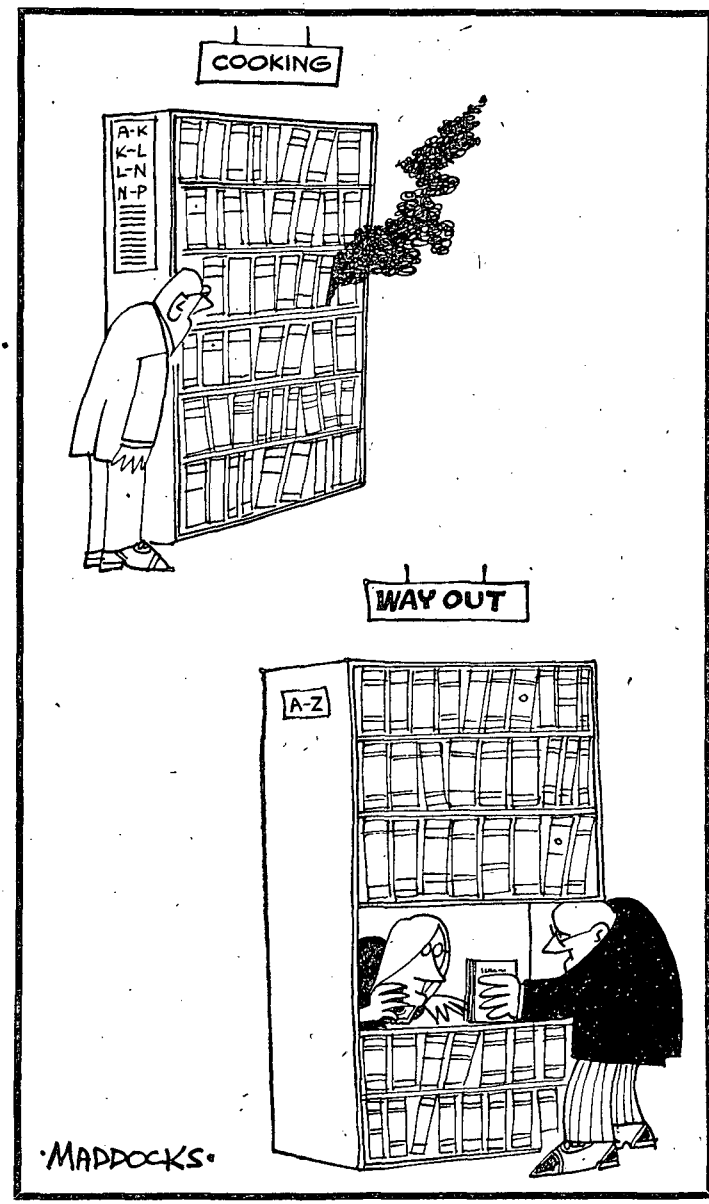

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A two-minute tale

AN ANIMAL LIKE NOTHING

By WOLF MANKOWITZ

THERE was a man once who, after a life-time of effort and self-discipline, succeeded in loving nothing. Nothing moved him to tears or laughter; no human form delighted him; no child's face brought the blood to his cheeks. He loved nothing.

Living as he did wherever he happened to be—for no place mattered to him, and home was where he slept—he saw many people and passed by many strange things. He spoke to many, and many answered him with friendship, but no words ever warmed him, for no sound could reach his heart. No miraculous blending of sunlight and colour and movement could make that heart expand with hope for life.

Once he had loved indiscriminately, as young men can. And he found that everything began to mean so much to him that, casting in every direction after the fleeting painful feelings, his head grew confused. Then he could think of nothing clearly. He could feel nothing certainly. Feeling, he discovered, was an impediment to thought, and consequently he applied himself to the problem of relinquishing all feeling. And in the end he won through, so that he could look at the world with eyes as interested as a microscope, and, seeing everything, care for no part of what he saw.

It was in this supreme state that he one day happened to walk into a forest. For a while he appreciated the stillness of the place. Then training asserted itself, and looking more carefully about him, he saw that the peace of the place was superficial.

In the trees birds and squirrels scrambled after a living and,

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having achieved it for a while, quietly died. Upon the ground insects and reptiles crept in despair at the difficulties of life. And beneath the ground, too, the same life went on—the same thing all over again with less noise and equal ferocity.

He was pleased to be able to smile at the irony of it all, and he was glad that he loved nothing.

Because the forest pleased him in this way, the man determined to remain there for a time. He built himself a shelter of boughs and ferns, a bed of grass; food he found in plenty running about, and growing upon the trees and bushes.

"How extraordinary," he often thought, "that I, who care for nothing, should find this entire forest prepared to care for me. It gives me shelter, it provides a comfortable couch to rest upon, its berries and rabbits and roots feed me, its complexity never fails to entertain me." And he grew no less amazed as time passed and the forest became used to him, and even the animals and birds which he hunted watched him without fear as he set his snares.

One day he was busy about his snares and smiling at the animals who watched him at work and who would soon walk into his traps, when he noticed that one of them regarded him out of eyes which were more human than a rabbit's, and more animal than a man's. He stood up to observe the creature better.

"What animal is that?" he wondered. "Its body is furry, its ears close to its head, its mouth soft, its paws small and free of claws, its eyes full of meaning—meaning so important that I am at a loss to understand it." And then the animal looked finally at him and turned away.

In the evening the man was lying by his shelter considering the idiocy of those who are prey to love.

"They desire and hurt one another," he mused. "They possess and destroy—their minds are fevered, their bodies ache, they are endlessly in turmoil. While I who no longer love can never hurt another. I ask for nothing—for I do not need the assurance of love which gifts carry—and yet I receive everything. In this way I will live until I no longer live, and I am quite certain that nothing more than that can be done."

Then a low, long cry told him that his snare had secured him his dinner, and he rose and walked towards it.

When he reached it, he discovered the strange animal he had seen earlier in the day, caught by a hind foot in the trap. Its face was wet with tears and its lips trembled. Yet still its eyes were so full of a meaning beyond his comprehension that

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he stood and wondered as he had not for so many years wondered at anything.

"I do not pretend to understand what your eyes are saying," said the man to the animal, "but I concede its importance and I will release you. In the interests of knowledge I will keep you by me for a while." And so he did.

He took it back to his shelter and watched it and talked to it and speculated endlessly upon it. To no end. Eventually he accepted the fact that he would never pierce the secret meaning behind its eyes, and settled himself down to enjoy the questions which the animal's presence for ever raised. Where had it come from? What was it? It never answered.

One cold morning, the man was searching for his snares among the bracken, when he heard strange cries and sighing from beyond a mound a little way off. Anticipating a rabbit or even something larger, he crawled stealthily towards the spot. To his amazement, he discovered the strange silent animal he had captured with another of its sort.

They looked into each other's eyes with that same expression which had tantalised him for so long. And as they looked they sighed, and uttered little cries; but whether of gladness or despair, he could not say. Then, without seeing him, the two creatures ran off together into the forest.

As he slept through the cold night he dreamed again and again of the strange eyes. Then the next day, as he tore down the shelter and left the forest, he decided that the secret of the animal's eyes was no secret. It simply had eyes like that.

But as he walked away through the chill air, his own eyes were full of strange meaning, and when he told himself again how fortunate he was to love nothing, an unusual laughter tore from his heart to his lips.

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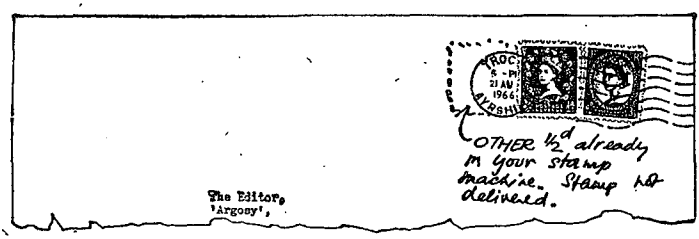
POSTSCRIPT



It reached us. And the postmark was Scotland!

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SERGEANT'S

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PRIDE

His strength spent, he struggled to survive . . . By MICHAEL HASTINGS

THE truck was now a lonely black object, wobbling in the heat haze like a hovercraft having trouble in rising on its cushion of air. There was nothing else to see out there; only the gritty desert, its sterile particles consolidated in places to form coarse-surfaced rock.

A dirty great dustbowl, the sergeant thought, peering from the pool of shadow where he was lying. He narrowed his eyes but the glare still hurt. Then a slight sound, quite close, made him turn his head quickly.

"Jukes!" he shouted hoarsely. "Leave that bloody water alone!"

"Only a trickle, Sarge," Jukes pleaded.

"Shove the stopper back. I'll tell you when you can drink."

Jukes obeyed, with resentful slowness. Before looking out again the sergeant rested for a few seconds, eyes closed. Anger was like another of those waves of heat exhaustion, when the entire body seemed to glow with fever.

"Watch it!" he told himself. He heard Corporal Watts saying quietly, "It'd sweat out of you before it reached the bottom of your throat, Jukes."

Little Dorset, behind a rock which looked like a rough and sinister tombstone, gasped, "An' I thought the camp just a lousy dump in the middle of nowhere! Give a year's pay . . ."

Corporal Watts suddenly jumped up as if activated by an invisible spring.

He stood listening for a few seconds and then dropped limply into the shade again.

The sergeant, startled into opening his eyes, scowled. "I said to keep down."

The corporal, a trifle shame-faced, apologised. "Sorry. I

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could've sworn I heard something. Like the drone of a chopper."

"They won't be searching for us yet."

"It's this flaming heat," Watts grumbled. "Gives you noises in the head."

The sergeant fought back his irritation. "Next time you think you hear something don't leap like a scared rabbit. Stay put—you'll hear just as well."

"Yes, Sarge," Watts muttered, subdued.

They'd all be imagining things soon, the sergeant suspected. He'd made up his mind not to believe anything until he'd checked it carefully. He couldn't afford a mistake; it would weaken his authority and he was going to need all of that to bring them through. He didn't know how much support he could expect from the corporal. Watts was reliable enough to be put in charge of the spare can of water; but he was inclined to be easy-going.

The sergeant moved slightly, trying to ease his aching body. His skin was sensitive and every crease in his clothing rasped like a small file. He looked out in the direction of the truck again. His eyes felt as if they were set in hot embers.

He whispered, "Where are you, you bastards? Why don't you come after us?"

It was against reason, wanting to see minute specks closing in on the abandoned truck. A sort of death wish, because when that happened it would only be a short time before the fighting end was upon them, the agony of uncertainty over.

He obtained brief glimpses of the distant hills, some miles beyond the truck. They might have been a layer of mist, thickening and dispersing by turn. It was there the tribesmen had opened up on them. Just one lousy bullet, he thought. After that, with petrol leaking from the hit, the truck was doomed.

When it finally jolted to a halt they should, according to the book, have stayed by it to give the ultimate air search a chance of spotting them. But they'd stopped in the middle of a flatness which offered no cover except under the truck, and if the enemy were following up that would take only one well-lobbed grenade. So he'd given the order to move off, making for this low, rock-strewn ridge. But that decision of his could only be the right one if the tribesmen came, lusting for the kill.

Perhaps that was why he wanted to see something moving out there.

The great red circle of the sun began to dip behind the barren hills to the west, making their outline stark and hard. The patches of shadow which had gradually flowed round the rocks

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were expanding. From the east the darkness was creeping forward, starting to engulf the truck.

The sergeant told the others they could drink, warning them to take it slowly. "And go easy on it. God knows when we'll get more."

The trickle he permitted himself was almost worse than going without; it stimulated a frenzied desire to gulp and gulp until there was none left. Even then, he knew, the craving would remain unsatisfied. After the tepid water they tried to eat, breaking into the packs of iron rations. Nobody took much; there seemed no flavour and it was difficult to swallow.

"What do we do now, Sarge?" Watts asked, moving closer.

"We march."

The sergeant had spent most of the past hour wrestling with that problem, forcing his mind to concentrate though it felt as exhausted as his body.

They could make their way back to the truck. That, though, was the very thing the tribesmen, if still around, would expect them to do and it could mean walking slap into an ambush. They could stay where they were, postponing a decision until daylight permitted a reassessment of the position. But suppose the enemy crept up in the darkness, ready for a dawn attack? Besides, he had a deeper, more personal fear: that he would crack under the strain of extending the inactivity and the anxious waiting.

Watts said doubtfully, "Means giving up any chance of getting back to the truck, Sarge."

"What if the bastards are out there waiting for us? We lose time and that means wasting water. We'll be getting weaker, too."

Jukes, near enough to hear, protested, "I'm too done up to march, Sarge."

"Stay behind if you prefer. We'll send a truck for you so you can ride. Even if you're dead you can still ride. They'll bring you in, just the same."

The sergeant was glad Dorset laughed. It relieved the tension.

"Getting cooler," Corporal Watts said.

The sergeant had realised that. The sweat was drying on his face, like a tacky varnish. And when he breathed it was less like doing it at the opening door of a high-temperature oven.

"Start in ten minutes!" He tried to give his voice that ring of authority, but failed. His throat was worse than the time he'd had laryngitis.

The corporal edged nearer.

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"How far is it?" he asked.

Watts did have enough sense to keep his voice low, the sergeant thought. But it wasn't a question he was willing to answer. If the others got the fool idea that by daybreak they'd be within sight of the camp, so much the better for the time being. Keep their spirits up and their legs moving.

He said, "Let's get out of danger before we work that out."

When the time came to move, the sergeant went first, down through the rocks. He only paused once, to whisper hoarsely, "Less noise back there! Want 'em to hear we're pulling out?"

It wasn't a march but a laboured plodding, with each foot sinking a little and making it impossible to manage a springing stride. In the beginning and throughout the first hour, the sergeant's anxiety was centred on a ridge just south of their route. He was afraid the tribesmen, cheating his vigilance, had managed to make a detour and reach this. But gradually that potential danger was left behind and with the increasing distance the ridge became just part of the night.

At the end of the second hour they halted. The order was received in silence and he could sense the men's rancour. He knew it was up to him to explain he'd kept them going until they were a reasonable distance from that ridge, but the right words eluded him and he was too tired to make the effort. So he just lay where he'd flung himself, staring up at the stars. Some of them were twinkling, as if flashing messages across the immensity of space; that space which appeared to curve downward to embrace the similar desolation of the empty land.

The periods of marching shortened and those of resting lengthened. The sergeant was increasingly aware of how physical achievement was lagging behind the target his mind was setting. There was no moon, but the stars gave sufficient light for him to distinguish the line of low hills which he knew it was imperative they should reach before the merciless heat of the day was upon them.

He was aware of one other thing: a steadily widening gulf between his companions and himself. He was driving them hard and their resentment was deepening into something near hatred. They had forgotten that their sufferings were his sufferings. The only restraint on outright revolt was their training, the obedience to orders which had become part of their nature. Even that, he knew, was wearing very thin.

Darkness began to lift from the east and a long pale green banner was unfurling across the sky. With the onset of day the air freshened a little, reviving them. Looking back at the three

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Born in the Midlands, Michael Hastings was a Flight-Lieutenant in the R.A.F. during World War II, serving mostly in the Middle East. He has had thirteen adventure novels published, all with exotic settings, and his short stories have appeared both in Britain and abroad. He is married, and lives on the south coast.

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men, though, the sergeant could see how near they were to complete exhaustion. He studied the faces, briefly, anxiously. Corporal Watts was long-featured, with eyes set rather close together and the eyebrows linking in a straight line. Little Dorset had an elfin face, with a nose that turned up slightly as if squeezed out of shape by being pressed against windows. Jukes was coarser-looking, with a scar at one corner of his mouth which increased the surliness of his expression.

Three faces, yet they seemed to the sergeant to be three different aspects of the same face; unshaven, tired-eyed, weary almost to the point of collapse.

They'd made it, though. They'd reached the first of the hills and when they started to drag themselves up amongst the boulders he looked back. The pastel shades preceding the appearance of the sun had gone, and now the blue was deepening and spreading. He could see the hillock from which they'd set out on the night journey, and in the clear air its apparent nearness mocked the exhausting effort of the long march. It looked as though that distance could have been covered in an hour.

Corporal Watts, a few yards to his right, called, "Here's a good spot, Sarge!"

It was a narrow cleft a little below the summit of the hill and on the north side. In a less savage climate there might well have been a tarn, but here the bottom of the cleft was bone dry, cluttered with the debris eroded from the rock by sandstorms. But there was the promise of ample shade.

The sergeant nodded his approval and waved impatiently to Dorset and Jukes, who were still labouring twenty feet below the rim of the cleft.

"You move more like bloody cripples than trained soldiers," he grumbled when they finally made it.

Their silence was that of weariness, and when they lowered themselves to rest it was as though parts of their bodies had given way. Corporal Watts was still standing, leaning against a great slab of rock. The sergeant went past him, saying, "I'm going to take a shufti from the top. Watch those two; make sure they don't gulp down all their water."

It was not much of a climb from the cleft to the summit of

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the hill but it was not easy, and the extra exertion made the sergeant feel so faint that twice he was forced to stop, clinging to the rock and closing his eyes until the weakness passed.

When he reached his objective he looked resolutely to the east, sternly suppressing a wild and foolish hope that if he looked the other way he might see the camp in the distance. Reason told him that couldn't be, that the camp lay not merely behind today's horizon but behind the horizon of tomorrow. Or of the day after tomorrow, perhaps.

So for fully five minutes he stared in the direction from which they'd come, satisfying himself there was no movement out there, no indication of enemy pursuit. But even with all this mental schooling, when he finally turned there was a feeling of disappointment, of thwarted hope. Through a gap between the hills he could see the forbidding emptiness of a land where everything had died long, long ago.

His grip on his automatic rifle tightened until his knuckles showed white. Between his teeth he swore, "We'll make it. I'll march them every bloody step of the way back to the camp."

The sergeant recognised it was his duty to bring the others back to safety if he could; that was the burden of responsibility. But up there on the summit he had, he felt, committed himself more deeply. Like taking a solemn oath. Unaccountably, for he could find no logical explanation, the more he concentrated on that undertaking, the more inner strength he derived from it. There was another effect; he became mentally isolated, withdrawn from his companions. Although he was pledged to save them, he had no pity for their sufferings under the heat torment of that day. His attitude towards them was more of impatience and anger; their weakness was the one thing which might thwart his purpose.

Watching them as they lay gasping and sweating in the shadow of the burning rocks, he thought: They hate my guts. I'm forcing them to cling to life. It hurts and they can't take it.

The day seemed unnaturally long, as though there'd been some breakdown in the solar system and the earth's rotation had slowed. The air was hot, drying their mouths and throats, increasing the agonies of thirst. Breathing and heart-beats quickened and, while there was no delirium, their minds became confused. Nobody was inclined to talk and that made the time drag still more.

At last there came the mercy of the sunset. The sergeant struggled to his feet, moving a few steps to test his legs.

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"Get ready to march," he ordered.

Corporal Watts obeyed, but Jukes and little Dorset stared stupidly, making no effort to move.

The sergeant raised his rifle. Through cracked lips he snarled, "You'll bloody well get going—or I'll shoot."

Watts limped over and said quietly, "Come on, chaps." He reached out a hand to Jukes and then did the same for Dorset.

The sergeant set off purposefully and the others followed painfully, stumbling at times, weaving unsteadily once they were away from the rocks and in the sand. That night might well have been the end of them. Instead of calling a halt at fairly regular intervals, the sergeant was forced to do it every time someone collapsed. Usually it was Jukes, but twice it was Dorset, and once the corporal went down. Sunrise caught them out in the open, quite a distance from the ridge which the sergeant had selected as their objective.

The only shelter they could find was a slight depression, a saucer which offered no more than a narrow belt of half-shadow. The heat was intense and as the day wore on they became so weakened that the sergeant had to increase the water ration. They emptied their flasks and then had some from the spare can. What was left, distributed fairly by the corporal, went into their flasks.

Somehow, they survived; but they were so exhausted that when they struggled to the ridge, with several hours of darkness left, the sergeant realised it was impossible to push on farther.

He got no thanks for this decison; the men were too spent. They quickly fell into the sleep of exhaustion. The sergeant slept, too, and it was the most refreshing sleep he'd had since the ambush. When he awakened, it was so long after dawn there were already shadows at the base of the rocks. Stiffly, he struggled to his feet. Corporal Watts, his eyes strangely sunken and the lower part of his face masked by a growing beard, glanced at him questioningly.

"Up there," the sergeant said, pointing to the summit of the ridge. He left his rifle; but even with both hands free he was surprised at the difficulty of the climb. The rocks were hot; hot to his hands, hot through his clothing. His legs were weak, and in the act of climbing he frequently had to pause, gathering strength to raise himself to the next foothold. And all the time the summit looked tantalisingly near. He could remember stiffer climbs he'd managed within five minutes; this one seemed to be taking that many hours. He struggled upwards, sobbing more from sheer frustration than from the physical agony.

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When finally he reached the top he was too weak to stand. He rested, eyes closed, his hands shielding them against the sun, for even lowered eyelids were insufficient covering. He was sweating, but strength-sapping moisture seemed to evaporate, leaving only a stickiness.

At first his mind seemed to wander and he drifted into a state of partial consciousness, so that there were brief spells when he neither knew who he was nor what he was doing there. Gradually, however, his will reasserted itself. He remembered what he had to do and, as so many times before, he gained strength from that purpose which had become a kind of dedication. Those three down below; they hated him, but he'd show them. They'd march with him into the camp. He'd lead them from this living death back to life.

Slowly, like one rising from a sickbed after a long illness, he got to his feet. As he turned, he looked first to the south. There were two small hills, so much alike that at first he suspected he was suffering from double vision. But then, as he peered through narrowed eyes, he was able to distinguish slight differences in the patches of shadow which mottled them. Through the gap between he could see something else. Not just the open plain but some long, low trails of dust, steadily approaching from the south west. They were too flat to be dust devils, too regularly spaced to be of natural origin, and they were proceeding along a faint but discernible line.

He had to be sure. He tried in vain to hold in check the relief which was like the severing of the cords of tension. But there was no mistake. He was looking at army transport moving along a desert track, still too distant for it to be possible to attract attention, but he knew that once they reached that track rescue was a virtual certainty.

It had to be the supply route between the base camp and some advance posts.

So the ordeal was as good as over. One final effort . . . He was a little surprised at not feeling greater excitement; but perhaps that was a result of weariness.

Then, just as he was turning to begin the descent from the summit, he saw something else, something more to the west. It was the circling speck in the sky which he noticed first and he took it to be a vulture. But immediately below the speck, shimmering in the haze, there was the orderly pattern of huts and tents. The camp! And the speck must be an aircraft preparing to land on the narrow airstrip.

It was as the sergeant was scrambling down over the rocks

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that the idea presented itself; so forcefully that he rested between boulders to think it out. If they made for the desert track and were picked up by a vehicle, that would seem to his men a gift of good fortune and the driver would be looked on as the rescuer. Was his own suffering, his iron resolution, to receive so little credit?

"Luck," he whispered. "No, not luck. It must be my way."

Concentrated thinking was difficult and no suspicion entered his mind that his plan to struggle grimly on until they reached the camp had become an obsession. He'd lived with it through so many torment-filled hours that he was incapable of relinquishing it.

When at last he joined the others, Corporal Watts seemed not to have stirred. Little Dorset was awake, his eyes like those of a suffering animal. Only Jukes was still sleeping, his open mouth adding to the scruffy ugliness of his face.

The sergeant stared at them for a few minutes, seeing their weakness not with pity, only with a certain contempt. He suddenly felt conscious of a pride in his own toughness, his strength of will. He said, believing he spoke with authority, unaware that his croaking voice was a travesty of that, "We march. The camp's in sight—due west of us."

Watts and Dorset stared at him. Stupidly, he thought. He said impatiently, "Come on! I've seen it. We can make it in a few hours."

As it had been with himself, there was no wild exultation. They were too spent even to realise fully that this meant they were saved. Corporal Watts put trembling hands to his face. Little Dorset tried to speak but couldn't, then turned and shook Jukes by the shoulder.

"What is it?" Jukes whispered, struggling out of a sleep which was not far removed from death.

Dorset found his voice. "The camp! We're near the camp!"

Corporal Watts, his voice as unsteady as his hands, said weakly, "You mean march now, Sarge? In the heat of the day? Not sure we'll be able to make it." He hesitated. "You know how distances can fool you."

"Stick it out here—with no water?" The sergeant fought down his rising anger. He knew it would be bad, increasing his already rapid pulse rate. He simply must control himself. In silent disgust he gathered up his equipment, wrapping the piece of sacking round his rifle which otherwise would become too hot to hold.

Why be burdened with them? he asked himself. They'd only

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slow him down. He'd make it faster on his own. He was the strong one.

He said, "Right. Stay here, then. I'll tell them where to find you." And without another word, without so much as a backward glance, he set off down the ridge.

It was two hours after the sergeant left them that Corporal Watts struggled back from a climb to the summit. He moved unsteadily and collapsed into the shade. Jukes and little Dorset waited patiently. They were well accustomed to waiting; waiting for the next time they could take a miserable ration of water, waiting for the agony of the sunshine to end, waiting for the order to resume that other agony of marching.

Corporal Watts spoke at last. "We'll be okay. There's a desert track just south of us, I saw a truck. Reach that and we'll be picked up. We'll set off just before sundown."

They stared at him.

"But the camp!" Jukes said hoarsely. "The sarge said . . ."

Corporal Watts shook his head. "Must have been a mirage. There's nothing over there to the west."

It wasn't entirely true; he'd fancied he could see a solitary speck creeping on into the vast emptiness of the dead land. It was impossible to go after the sergeant; the most they could do would be to direct a search party. Perhaps he'd be found in time.

"A mirage," Jukes repeated. "Crazy bastard!"

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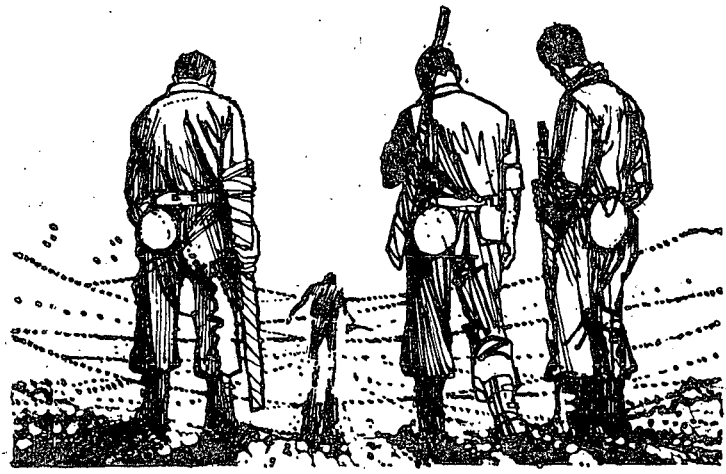

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Said Mr. Smith, "I really cannot
Tell you, Dr. Jones—
The most peculiar pain I'm in—
I think it's in my bones."

Said Dr. Jones, "Oh, Mr. Smith,
That's nothing. Without doubt
We have a simple cure for that;
It is to take them out."

WALTER DE LA MARE, *Stuff and Nonsense*

On Dr. Isaac Letsome, Physician

When people's ill they comes to I,
I physics, bleeds, and sweats 'em;
Sometimes they live, sometimes they die;
What's that to I? I. Letsome.

ANON.

A senior consultant came to a hospital in which I was working . . . We dutifully trailed after the great man, hanging upon every word. Among other things, he explained about the detection of fluid levels in the chest, and we were shown X-ray pictures of this. Then he said it was possible to assess this clinically by actually shaking the patient (a short rapid movement), and listening for a splash with a stethoscope. He demonstrated this, and then asked one of the medical students to try it. The student did so, then stepped back into place saying, "Oh, yes! Very obvious, couldn't miss hearing it."

"Well," said the cockney voice of the patient, " 'e ought to. I was 'olding me 'ot water bottle!"

KATHLEEN PRESS

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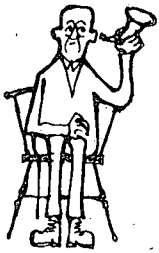

Enough is Enough

An old man went to a Doctor and complained he was losing his hearing.

"How old are you?" asked the Doctor.

"Ninety-two," was the reply.

"Ah," said the Doctor, "you've heard quite enough."

J. R. B.

ON SIR JOHN HILL, M.D., PLAYWRIGHT.

For physic and farces his equal there scarce is;
His farces are physic; his physic a farce is.

DAVID GARRICK.

Patient Inquiry

The telephone rang at the hospital . . .

"Can you tell me, please, how Sid Sykes is?"

"Do you know which ward he is in?"

"Ward 12."

"Wait a minute, I will put you through to the Sister."

"Sid Sykes?" said the Sister. "He seems to be getting on very nicely . . ."

"Do you know when he will be having his stitches out?"

"In about a couple of days now, I should think."

"He won't be long before he comes out then, I expect?"

"Only two or three days probably. Can I tell him who rang, and is there any message?"

"Yes, this *is* Sid Sykes ringing from Ward 12. I just wondered how I was getting on."

JOE (MR. PIANO) HENDERSON

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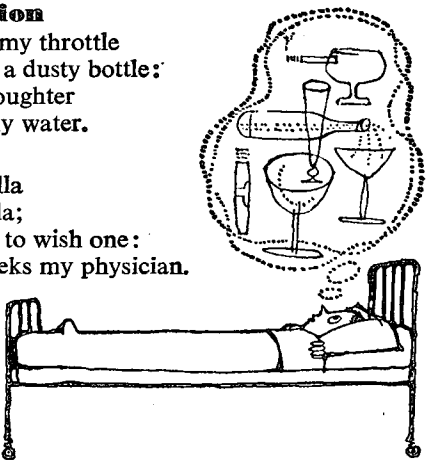
Fevered Imagination

Oh, how I love to souse my throttle
With rich red wine from a dusty bottle:
Alas! My doctor says I oughter
Drink only tea and Vichy water.

I'd love to puff a panatella
With any other lusty fella;
Alas! if I should chance to wish one:
"*Tabac's* tabooed!" shrieks my physician.

ROBERT SERVICE,
Collected Verse.



CAME THE DAWN

I woke like a log, one eye at a time. Dimly I perceived beside my bed the night-nurse, a basin of water in one hand, a thermometer in the other.

"Do you feel like a little wash now?" she said brightly.

"No, Nurse, I do not," I said . . . "All that I need is sleep and this is the hour of all hours in the day when I sleep the best. And if I am not to sleep I will not be washed"...

"You will be washed now," she said, and untucking all my snug bed-clothes, she piled them in a disorderly and draughty heap on my legs . . .

"It is extraordinary," I said. "Whenever the doctor comes he inquires if I have slept well; when Sister comes in she asks anxiously how I slept; last night you gave me, yourself, two different preparations or drugs to make me sleep; all the resources of medicine have been mobilised to make me sleep. Yet when I do sleep, or rather when at last I drop into a final doze, I am immediately woken up. And for what purpose? To be washed!"...

"Are you comfortable *now*?" said the night-nurse at last.

"I am not," I said. "I do not feel nearly so well . . . what about breakfast?"

The night-nurse arranged upon the table a number of nasty-looking steel instruments.

"The doctor is coming before breakfast," she said, "to take your stitches out. And," she added wickedly, "I hope it hurts."

A. P. HERBERT, *Look Back and Laugh.*

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All a man can do when fate sends him a shining dream is to embrace it and fight for it . . .

Dividends

BY SEAN O'FAOLAIN

AS far as Mel Meldrum was concerned, *l'affaire Anna*, as he was to call it, began one wet and windy April morning in 1949, when his chief clerk, Mooney, knocked at the door of his sanctum, handed him my letter, marked "Personal" and "By Hand," and said that the bearer was an old lady in a black bonnet sitting in the outer office "shaking her blooming umbrella all over your new Turkish carpet."

I could see Mel glancing at my signature, smiling at his memories of our college days together twenty-five years before, rapidly taking the point of the letter and ordering Miss Whelan to be shown in to him at once. He would rise courteously, beg her to be seated and watch amusedly while she fumbled in her woven shopping bag and produced a fat, wrinkled envelope containing the £350 in thirty-five white Bank of England notes. I could imagine him taking it from her with a small smile and bow. It was why I sent her to him: I had remembered that he was always affable, almost unctuous, with old ladies.

My Aunty Anna Maria was my mother's sister. Until she got this small legacy from another sister, who had recently died, she had never before possessed such a sum of money. She had existed for thirty-odd years on a modest salary as cook-housekeeper to a highly successful horse trainer in County Kildare; and then on the small pension he kindly gave her, supplemented occasionally by minute subvention from a nephew here and a niece there, whenever we had the decency to remember how she used to stuff us with cakes and lemonade during our summer holidays on the edge of the Curragh, where we loved to visit her in the staff quarters of the trainer's house.

My father died in Cork, so she came down there when she was about fifty-five, to live with my mother, and when my mother died, she stayed on, alone, living in a single room in a battered

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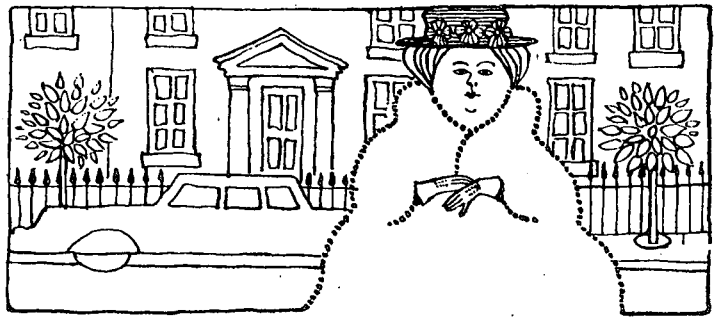

old fabric of a tenement overlooking one of Cork's many abandoned quaysides—silent except for the poor kids from the lanes around, playing and screaming in the street, or the gulls swooping over the bits of floating orange skin or bread crusts or potato peelings backing slowly upriver on the high tide.

When Mel saw her, she had turned seventy. To my shame, I had not seen her for twelve years. I had left Cork before she came to live there and returned only once, for my mother's funeral. I was now married and living in Dublin.

It had taken me weeks of letter writing, back and forth, to persuade her to invest her legacy, and I was delighted when she agreed because I knew that if she didn't invest it, she would either scatter it in dribs and drabs or hide it in some corner of her room and not remember where before the mice had chewed it into confetti.

Mel described their interview to me in a long, amusing letter. He accepted the envelope "with measured ceremony." He gave her his best advice "like a pontiff." He explained to her that the sum was too small for an annuity and she was too old for growth shares, so he must advise her to buy eight per cent preference shares in Sunbeam-Wolsey. He refused to charge her his usual stockbroker's fee and, kindest act of all, told her that, instead of waiting from one six-month period to the next for her modest dividends (£28 a year), she might come into the office on the first of every month, and his chief clerk would pay her the equivalent of her £28 per annum in twelve equal portions. She accepted his offer "like a queen."

I could henceforth be happy to think of her toddling into Meldrum, Guy and Meldrum on the first of every month, smiling and bobbing under her black, spangled bonnet and departing, amid the pleased smiles of everybody in the office, with her six

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shillings and eight pennies, wrapped in two single pound notes, clasped in her gloved fist.

I sent Mel my cordial thanks and thought no more about her until exactly one year later, when he wrote me that she had ordered him to sell her shares. It appeared that she had become smitten by a sudden longing to possess a blue brocade armchair she had seen in the window of a store. It appeared further that, for months, "a certain Mrs. Bastable and a certain Mrs. Sealy," two old cronies as doddering as herself, had been telling her that nobody but "a born foolah" would leave "all that lovely money" lying idle in Mister Meldrum's fine office on the South Mall.

It was easy enough to imagine how these two tempters worked on her: "Sure, Miss Whelan, you could buy all the armchairs in Cork with that much money! And look at your poor ould room, with the paint falling off the ceiling like snow! And your poor ould curtains in tathers on yer winda! Why don't you buy an electric heater that would keep you warm all the winter? And two grand, soft Blarney blankets for your bed? And a nice pink eiderdown blanket? And, anyway, sure that measly ould two quid that Meldrum gives you wouldn't buy a dead cat! And supposing yeh die? What'll happen it then? Get ahold of your money, girl, and spend it!"

Mel counterargued and counterpleaded. I pleaded. I got her parish priest to plead with her. I even offered to buy her the brocade armchair as a present. It was no use. Mel sold her shares, gave her a cheque for £350, wished her well, and we both washed our hands of her.

I next got a long and slightly testy letter from Mel. It began: "Your good Aunty Anna has this morning turned up again in my office, calmly asking my chief clerk for what she calls, if you please, her little divvies."

In dismay, he had gone out to talk to her himself. "But, Miss Whelan, you've sold your shares! Don't you remember?"

Aunt Anna Maria smiled cunningly at him. "Ah, yes!" she agreed. "But I didn't sell my little divvies!"

"But," Mel said, "your dividends accrued from the capital sum you invested. Once a client sells his shares, he withdraws the capital, and there can be no more dividends. Surely you understand that?"

At once, Aunty Anna's smile vanished. A dark fright started at the bottom of her chin and climbed slowly up to her eyes.

"Mister Meldrum, you know well that I didn't sell me little divvies. I want me little divvies. You always gave me them. They

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belong to me. Why can't you give them to me now, the way you always gave me them?"

"Miss Whelan, when a client sells his shares, they are gone. And when they are gone, the dividends naturally cease forthwith. You instructed me to sell. I did so. I gave you back your money in a lump sum. If you now wish to give me back that lump sum, I shall be most happy to buy you more shares, and your dividends will begin again. Otherwise, we don't have anything for you."

Aunty Anna burst into a flood of tears. "What do I want with shares? All I want is me little divvies. And anyway, I haven't the money you gave me. I bought an armchair with it, and an electric heater, and a costume from Dowden's, and I gave fifty pounds to the canon to say Masses for my poor soul when I'm dead, and I loaned ten quid to Mrs. Bastable on the ground floor, and ten quid to Mrs. Sealy on the third floor back, and what with this and that and the other, all I have left is a few quid, and I don't know where I put 'em.

"I'd lay down me life I put 'em in the brown teapot on the top shelf, but when I went looking for them yesterday, I couldn't find them high nor low. Mrs. Sealy says I must have made tea with them, but I tell you, Mister Meldrum, I wouldn't trust that one as far as I'd throw her. Mister Meldrum, give me me little divvies. I want me little divvies. They're all I have to live on now, barring that mangy old pension. I want me divvies here and now, if you please, or I'll go out there in the street and call a policeman!"

Mel led her gently into his inner sanctum, together with his bookkeeper, and the two of them spent an hour explaining to her, in every way they could think of, the difference between shares and dividends. They might as well have been talking to the carpet. Aunty Anna just could not understand that he who does not speculate cannot accumulate.

The upshot of it all was that she became so upset, and Mel became so angry with her, and then so upset because he had so upset her, that, to comfort her, he took £2 6s. 8d. out of his pocket —the equivalent of what she had hitherto lawfully drawn every month—told her that this was the end and that she must now reconcile herself, firmly and finally, to the plain fact that she was no longer in the market for anything, and so showed her out, bobbing, and smiling, and happy, and (he hoped) convinced. He was most forbearing about it all.

He wrote three pages about it to me. All I could do was write him a properly apologetic and deeply grateful reply, enclosing

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my cheque for £2 6s. 8d., which, I noted in some surprise, he duly cashed.

On the morning of the first of the following month of June, he was on the telephone. His voice over the wire sounded rather strangled.

"Your good aunt is back here in my office again. She is sitting directly opposite me. She seems to be in very good health. And in good spirits, to boot. In fact, she is beaming at me. Nevertheless, she is once more demanding dividends on shares she does not possess. Will you kindly tell me at once what you wish me to do with, for or to her."

"Oh, Lord, Mel! I'm awfully sorry. Look, couldn't you just explain firmly to the old lady that—"

At this, his voice rose to a squeak of utter exasperation. "Miss Whelan has been in my private office for the past three-quarters of a bloody hour, with my bookkeeper, my assistant bookkeeper, my chief clerk—"

"Mel! I'll tell you what to do. Just give her the two quid six and eight, and I'll send you a cheque for it this minute, and then tell her never to darken your door again."

Mel's voice became precise, piercing, priggish and prim, in a way that suddenly recalled to me a familiar side of his nature that I had completely forgotten until that moment.

"I have no hope whatsoever of achieving the entirely desirable state of affairs that you so blandly depict. I am afraid the time has arrived for you to come down to Cork in person and talk in person to your good aunt. Furthermore, I must tell you that your proposal about a cheque is totally contrary to my principles as a man and as a stockbroker. It is inconsistent, unrealistic, unprofessional and absurd. As I have explained to Miss Whelan, he who saves may invest, he who invests may accumulate, he who does not save may not—"

"Mel, for God's sake, come off it! Save? How the devil can she save anything at all on that measly pension of hers?"

"In that case," he retorted, "it is as absurd for her to expect as it would be unrealistic for me to pretend that she is entitled to returns on nonexistent capital. In the name of justice, equity, and realism—above all, in the name of realism—I will not and I cannot pretend to pay any client dividends that simply do not exist. . . Excuse me one moment."

I could hear a confused babble of voices. It sounded as though four or five people were engaged in passionate argument.

When he came back on the wire, he sounded angrier than ever.

"Hello!" he roared. "How soon, for God Almighty's sake, can

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you come down to Cork and settle this matter with your aunt?"

I saw that there was no way out of it. It was a Thursday. I said that I would take the morning train on Saturday.

He calmed down. He expanded. He even became amiable. When he broke into French, I remembered how, in his student days, he used to go to France every summer and Easter with his widowed mother.

"*Bon! Nous causerons de beaucoup de choses. Et nous donnerons le coup de grâce à l'affaire Anna, et à ses actions imaginaires,*" and hung up.

Actions? My dictionary told me that the word means activities, actions, performances, battles, stocks, shares. As I put back the volume on its shelf, I remembered how good he always used to be at social work among the poor of Cork. I also wondered how such a man could see nothing wrong with giving charity outside his office in the name of Saint Vincent de Paul, but everything wrong with the idea of bestowing largess inside it in the name of pity. I also realised that I had not seen him for twenty years . . .

It was a perfect June morning. All the way down from Dublin to Cork, the country looked so soft and fresh, so green and young, and I lunched so well on the train, that my heart gradually warmed both to Aunty Anna and to Mel. As the fields floated past, I started to recall with pleasure the Mel I used to know. Indeed, if anybody at that moment had asked me about him, I would have launched on a eulogy as long as an elegy.

Stout fellow! Salt of the earth! As fine a chap as you could hope to meet. Honest, kind and absolutely reliable. The sort of man who would never let you down. A most worthy inheritor of his father's and grandfather's business. Handsome, strong, tall, always well dressed—in the old days, we all thought him a bit of a dandy. And so easy! Oh, now and again he could be gruff if you rubbed him the wrong way, and he was sometimes given to playing the big shot. By that same token, he always boasted that he was a first-class shot. A real, clean-living, open-air man.

What else? Well-informed about music and the opera. Spoke French well—those visits abroad with his mother. A strong civic sense, always proud of his native city. Who was it who told me, a few years ago, that he was up to his neck nowadays in all sorts of worthy societies in Cork? The Old Folks Association, Saint Vincent de Paul, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the African Missions Brotherhood.

He always did keep a bit to himself, though. Not stand-offishly, more of a class thing, being so much richer than the rest of

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us. Or was he a little shy? And I did hear recently that he had given up shooting and taken to bird-watching—from a weekend cottage he had outside Cork.

Naturally, he was a Catholic. A most devoted Catholic. No! A baptised, confirmed and unmarried bachelor. That was odd, because he always had a great eye for the girls. Funny I never thought of it before. In Ireland you don't, somehow. You get so used to the widowed mother in the background, or the two brothers who are priests, or the three sisters who are nuns. The tradition of celibacy. But he did have that roving eye, and he was quite good-looking—even if he had slightly prominent teeth and a rather silly, affected way of shaving that left a tuft of hair on each cheekbone.

I closed my eyes to see him better, and wondered why I was going down here at all.

He was the first person I saw on the platform, in his tweeds and his sporty cap. The wings of his hair were turning white. His teeth were much too white to be his own. He wore spectacles. We greeted each other warmly, left the station teasing each other amiably about our advancing years, got into his white sports Jaguar and shot across the station yard like a bullet.

"Well?" I said. "And how did you finish up with my dear old Aunty Anna?"

He pretended to be coping with the traffic. Then, with a sheepish side-glance and grin that were clearly meant to involve me in his illogicality, he said, "I gave her the odd two quid again. She will obviously be back in a month. And every month for the rest of her life. Unless we do something drastic about her."

"I see. Are we going to do it now?" I asked.

"No! I don't work on Saturdays. And I'm not going to break my rule of life for that accursed hairpin. I'm driving you out to my Sabine farm. We've got the whole weekend. We'll talk about her tonight after dinner. And not one minute before!"

I bridled. After all, I was very fond of my Aunty Anna, even if I had not visited her for the past twelve years. And I objected to being shanghaied like this without as much as a "by your leave." Was he at his old game of playing the big shot? At close quarters, over a whole weekend, was he going to turn out to be an awful bore? However, he had been very kind to Aunty Anna, and I had got him into this mess, and I was under an obligation to him, so I said, as pleasantly as I could, "That's very kind of you, Mel. I can see my aunt tomorrow morning, and I'm sure there must be an afternoon train home."

"If that's what you want," he said, rather huffily. "If there is a

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train to Dublin on Sundays, I'm sure it takes about ten hours." Then he said, so smugly that anybody who did not know him could well have taken an immediate dislike to him, "You're going to like my cottage—it's a real beauty. Nobody in Cork has anything like it!"

I did not talk much during the drive into and out of the city; it reminded me too much of my father and mother, of my lost youth. He blathered on and on about its great future, its economic development, the airport they were sure to have some day, just as if he were the lord mayor of the place.

Then we were out of the city and in the country again, and presently—it cannot have been more than twenty minutes at his mad speed—he said, "Behold my Sabine farm!"

At first glance, through the trees, it looked like the sort of cottage that would make any estate agent start pouring out words like "rustic," "picturesque" and every other kind of euphemism for damp, dirty, crumbling and thoroughly uncomfortable. Close up, it turned out to be the sort of dream cottage you see on travel posters. It stood under its trim thatch roof on a sunbathed side road, in about two acres of orchard, kitchen garden and lawn, facing a small, old church, directly above the Lee, murmuring far below in a valley scooped out of the surrounding hills, covered now with young pine-woods. It was long, low and pink washed, with diamond panes in its small windows, and its walls were covered by a thick curtain of Albertine roses that would be a mellow blaze within a week or two.

The door was opened by a brown-eyed young woman, whom Mel introduced as "My housekeeper. My invaluable Sheila." The living room was long and low-ceilinged, furnished in elegant Adams and Chippendale, carpeted in pale green, with an unnecessary but welcoming wood fire sizzling softly in an old brick fireplace. Later, I found that he had put in central heating, electricity and an American-style kitchen. His Sheila brought us Scotch, water and ice cubes, and we sank into two deep armchairs beside the fire.

"You seem to live pretty well, my friend," I admitted grudgingly.

"I like the simple life," he said. "But I'm not simple-minded about it. I'm a realist."

I humphed to myself. I recognised the common illusion of most businessmen that writers are all mental defectives, dreamy romancers, with about as much common sense as would fit in one of their small toes. Really, all this might very well turn out to be a frightful bore.

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I became aware that his housekeeper was still standing beside us. Her brown eyes reminded me of two shining chestnuts. If her chin had not been a shadow overshot, she would have been a beauty. What struck me most about her was not, however, her face, her trim figure or her straight back, but her air of calm self-possession.

He gave her a quick, all-over glance. "Well, my dear? What are you giving us for dinner tonight?"

"Two roast chickens. Parsley potatoes. New. Your own. And fresh peas from the garden."

"And for sweet? Apart from yourself?" he asked, with that kind of gawky smile that celibates overdo for handsome young women.

"Apart from myself," she replied calmly, "there will be an apple pie. They are the last apples left in your loft."

"With cream?"

"Naturally."

"And the wine?"

She nodded to two bottles standing at a discreet distance from the brickwork of the fireplace. Gevrey-Chambertin: 1929.

"Excellent. We will dine at seven-thirty." He turned to me. "Drink up! I saw two kingfishers flashing along the river last week, and I want to see if they're still there. They've just got married," he added, with a raise-your-eyebrows grin at Sheila, who tossed her head and went off about her business.

"And where did that treasure come from?" I asked, carefully keeping the note of suspicion out of my voice, thinking that twenty-five years ago, I would have pulled his leg a mile long about her.

"Pure luck. She is a typist in my office. I used to have a dreadful old hairpin, as old and almost as doddery as your mad aunt. Then I found out that Sheila lives halfway between here and Cork, in a labourer's cottage on the side of the road. When I suggested that she might lend a hand and make some extra cash, she jumped at it. Every Friday night, I drive her home from the office on my way here, collect her on Saturday morning, and Bob's-your-uncle."

He gathered up his binoculars, notebook and camera, and we went off after the kingfishers. I enjoyed every minute of it, tramping for about three hours up and down the riverbed. He found his kingfishers, a nesting heron, and became madly excited when he picked out through his binoculars a buff-coloured bird with a long beak and a crest, perched on a tall beech tree.

"Can it possibly be a hoopoe?" he kept saying in a shouting

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whisper. As he entered every detail in his notebook, he became so boyish about it all that my earlier annoyance with him vanished completely.

And when, on the way home, I asked him casually how old he was and he said, "Forty-seven," my earlier suspicions also vanished. He was at least twice her age. By the time we got back to his cottage, I was not only so pleasantly tired but so relaxed that I told him I had decided not to return home until Monday morning.

The fire, now that the evening chill had come, was welcoming. I found that there were two baths and lots of hot water. I wallowed in mine for twenty minutes. When we both emerged, his Sheila made us a shaker of Martinis, and through them we moved leisurely into a perfect dinner. She had not roasted the chickens; she had broiled them *en papillotes*. She must have spent two hours on the apple pie alone; my wife, who is a first-rate cook, could not have improved on its delicate crust.

"Did you teach her all this cooking, Mel?"

"I confess that I have tried to play Professor Higgins to her Eliza. But only—" he winked "—as to her cooking. So far."

By the time we finished off the two bottles of Burgundy and retired to our armchairs before the fire, we were the old—that is, the young—Mel and Sean. She lighted two shaded lamps, brought us Italian coffee, a bottle of excellent brandy, two warmed glasses, the cigar box and our slippers.

"Wonderful woman!" I murmured. "I hope you never lose her."

"She is useful," he agreed shortly, poured the brandy and, like me, stretched out his long legs to the fire.

For a while, there was not a sound except the sizzle of the logs and an occasional slight tinkle from the direction of the kitchen. The deep, darkening country closed in around us in such utter silence that when I strained my ears to listen, I could hear, deep in the valley, the whisper of the river. Drowsily, I remembered that he had said we would talk about Aunty Anna tonight. I had no wish to talk about Aunty Anna, and by the sleepy way he was regarding the fire through his brandy glass, I hoped he felt the same. Then I heard his voice, and with something sharper than regret, I gathered that he had begun to talk about himself.

"Sean, I'm very glad you came. For a long time now, I've been working out a certain idea, and I want to try it out on you, just as a sort of test."

Just barely holding off sleep, I nodded.

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"Did it ever strike you that every man, which includes every woman, is his own potter? I mean, that sooner or later every man takes up what you might call the clay, or the Plasticene, or the mud, call it what you like, of his experience of life and throws it down on his potter's wheel, starts the pedal going and rounds it up into a shape? Into what I call his idea of the shape of his whole life? Are you following me?"

I nodded.

"Good! Now for the big snag. Why do we do this? I can't say we do it to please ourselves, because we can *have* no selves, can we? We can't see ourselves or *know* ourselves, can we? Therefore, we cannot *be* ourselves until we have made this shape and looked at it, as one would look in a mirror, and said, 'That's me! That's my vocation. My ambition. My politics. My faith. My whole life.' I mean," he pounded on, with a force of energy that made me even more sleepy than before, "I cannot say, 'That's me' until I have made my shape, because there was no *me* until I have made my shape. Therefore, I can get no real pleasure out of it all until the job is actually done. That's a pretty disturbing thought, isn't it?"

I pulled myself awake. What had I walked into? Two nights of this twaddle? There *had* to be a train tomorrow afternoon. "And when the job is done, Mel?"

"Then I begin to live. When I at last know exactly what I am, I at last know exactly what I want to do, because my shape, my image, now tells me what I do want to do."

I sighed and stretched. "And then, Mel, some other fellow comes along, and he looks at your portrait of the artist as a young dog, and he says, 'No! This may be some crazy dream Mel has of himself, or some crazy dream he has of the world as he would like it to be, but it's not our Mel, and it's not our world.'"

"And I might say the same to him—and to his world?"

"You certainly might. But, of course, I hope you're not so daft as to deny that, all the time, there must be a real, objective world outside there. Made up of stockbrokers, and tax collectors, and physicists, and isoprene, and—"

"By the way, rubber is going up."

"And gravitation, electricity, atomic weight, and people dying, and kingfishers mating, and so on and so on. And a real, objective you, me, and Tom, Dick, and Harry in each one of us, and no fancies and no fooling." I laughed. "Mel, you're a joy! I'm glad to inform you that you haven't changed one iota since the days when we used to come out of old Father Abstractibus's

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philosophy lectures and talk for hours about the Object and the Subject and 'What is reality?' And here you are, still at it! It's a pointless pursuit, and I'm in no mood for it, Mel! If we have to talk about anything at all on top of that wonderful dinner, and that marvellous Gevrey-Chambertin, and this perfect brandy, let's talk about a painfully real subject. Let's talk about my Aunty Anna."

"That," he said calmly, "is exactly what I am talking about. About people who live in imaginations, and fantasies, and illusions about themselves. About what, so far as I can see, the whole blessed world is doing all the time. Including your dear Aunty Anna Maria Whelan." He stretched out his foot and touched my ankle with the toe of his slipper. "Do you know what your dear Aunty Anna did with three hundred and fifty quid?"

"You told me. She bought an armchair, and an electric heater, and an eiderdown, and curtains, and Masses for her soul, and she gave loans to—"

"Rubbish! That's what she said. She bought a fur coat."

"You're a liar!"

"She is the liar."

"Then you're joking."

"It's no joke, my friend. The old divil had the cheek to have it on her back when she came into my office. When she went out, I had a brain wave. I rang up a friend of mine who works with the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in your aunt's neighbourhood, and I asked him to drop around and have a look at her place. No armchair, no electric heater, no new curtains, no nothing. And as for those loans—as he pointed out to me, the poor don't give anybody loans of ten quid. Ten shillings would be more like it. If that! You talk very glibly about the 'real, objective world outside there.' You don't seem to know so very much about it, after all, do you?"

I sat up. His air of condescension had infuriated me. "It was probably a cheap, second-hand coat!"

"I checked up on that, too. Cork is a small place, and there aren't many shops where you can buy fur coats. I rang up Bob Rohu, and I told him the whole story. I hit a bull's-eye at once. He sold it to her himself. He remembered the transaction very well. She paid him two hundred and seventy-five pounds for that fur coat." He paused, then concluded with sardonic formality, "You perceive my trend?"

I was furious, chastened and filled with pity for my aunt Anna. I saw that whatever picture Mel had of himself, it would

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not show him as anybody's fool. I could have choked him. Here was I, who had known Aunty Anna all my life, a man who was supposed to know something about human nature, and here was Mel, who had met Aunty Anna only three or four times, pitilessly exposing her to me: a woman stuck out there for thirty years on that big, grassy, empty plain of the Curragh of Kildare, working, since she was twenty, for a wealthy trainer, seeing his rich, horsy clients coming and going in all their finery, and thinking, as she grew older and older, with no man ever asking her to marry him, that she would never possess anything even dimly like what they possessed, until, by pure chance, at the age of seventy-odd, she finds herself drawing dividends like the best of them, trading in the stock market just like them, being received like a lady by the best stockbroker in Cork—and, at last, sees that fur coat in a shop window.

Mel was slowly rolling his brandy around in his glass and watching me slyly.

"Interesting, isn't it?" he said.

"Very," I said bitterly. After a silence, I said, "And this is why she won't get any more of what she thinks are her little divvies? Even if I agreed to pay you for them?"

He answered with anger, almost with passion, "It is. The woman is fooling herself, and I refuse to encourage her. She is trying to make nonsense of everything I believe in. And I won't let her do it. Would you, as a writer, write something you didn't believe to be true?"

"Don't be silly! I'm pleased and proud any time I think I'm telling even one tenth of the truth."

"Would you, if you were a doctor, tell lies to a patient?"

"Doctors have to do it all the time. To help their patients live. To make it easier for them to die."

"Well, I don't and won't tell lies. Facts are facts in my profession, and I have to live by them."

"You gamble."

"I do not."

"You encourage your clients to gamble."

"I do not."

"Then what do you do for a living?"

"I hope."

We laughed. We calmed down.

"What about charity, Mel?"

"I would have no objection to giving your aunt charity. In fact, I'd be quite happy to pay the old hairpin—"

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Sean O'Faolain's approach to his work is that of a superb craftsman who is satisfied only with perfection: "Poetry and punch—one dreams of packing them both into two thousand words, or less. It takes a lot of what in Brooklyn they call *woik.*" So concerned is he with achieving the appropriate effect, that he will not shirk rewriting a story a dozen times. *Midsummer Madness,* published in 1932, first brought him to the notice of the reading public, and since then his many works of fiction and biography have found a wide and an appreciative audience. Born in Cork in 1900, O'Faolain was a student both at the National University of Ireland, and at Harvard. For several years he taught in the Untied States and England, but in 1933 he returned to Ireland, where he has lived ever since. At present he is working on the second part of his autobiography.

Here the chill caution of the trained businessman entered his voice. "I'd be quite happy to go halves with you in paying her the equivalent of her blasted divvies every year. But not *as* dividends. Strictly as a gift from the pair of us."

"Mel, that's kind of you! Our whole problem is solved. Let's give her the twenty-eight pounds a year as a present."

"She won't take it."

"Why won't she take it?" I asked.

"Because it's charity. And she doesn't want charity. The poor never want charity. They hate it because it makes them feel their poverty. Any of them that have any pride left in them. And that old lady is stiff with pride. You could take a gift from me; I could take a gift from you; Queen Victoria would have taken all India and hung it on her charm bracelet without as much as a thank-you. But not the poor. You can try, though. Take the Jaguar tomorrow morning, and take her out to lunch. I bet you she'll refuse." He stood up. "Ah! Here we are!" he said.

This was for our Sheila, waiting, ready to be driven home. She

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was wearing a charming little fur hat and a neat, belted tweed coat. From under her hat, her dark hair curved around each cheek. Now that she was wearing high-heel shoes, I noticed how long and elegant her legs were.

"That," said Mel, surveying her, "is a darling little hat you have."

"I had it on this morning," she said quietly. "But men never notice anything."

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it, of course. It's a wild mink. I've been saving up for it for years. I got it at Rohu's."

"Good girl!" he said enthusiastically, and looked at me in approval of his pupil, while I wondered if he knew how much even that little dream of wild mink cost her. She might well have been saving up for it for years. "I'll bring around the car. I won't be long," he said to me. "Play some music while I'm gone. I've got some good records."

When he had gone, I said to her, "Won't you sit down while you're waiting?"

She sat down sedately on the arm of the chair Mel had vacated and crossed her pretty heron's legs.

"Do you like music, Sheila?"

"I used to like only jazz. Recently, I've come to prefer classical music. Mr. Meldrum has been introducing me to it. Shall I show you how to work the machine? It's new, and he is very particular about it. Oh!" she said, lifting the lid and looking in. "There's a record on already. It's the *Siegfried Idyll*. Would you perhaps prefer something more modern?"

I thought, You may only be a typist in his office, but you have the manners of a woman of the world. "Yes, I'd like to hear that again," I said. "It's years since I've listened to Wagner. Do *you* like it?"

"We've played it so often, now, that I'm just beginning to understand what it's all about."

"And what is it all about?" I smiled.

She switched on the machine and closed the lid. "I suppose it's about happiness through love. It takes a little time to warm up. Then it works automatically."

I glanced at her. Was she a deep one? Mel's horn hooted from the road. For the first time, she smiled. She had perfect teeth.

"I must be off. Don't let the fire die down. He sometimes sits up late. There are plenty of logs. And I've fixed the electric blankets at number-two heat, so they will be nice and cosy before you have finished your last nightcaps. Good night."

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After she had gone, I walked to the window to look after her and saw that a vast moon had risen over the dark hills surrounding the valley, touching their round breasts as softly as a kiss. He and she stood arm in arm looking at it, he leaning a little over her, pointing up to the moon as if he were showing it to an infant and saying something that caused her to laugh gloriously. Just as he touched her furry cap with his finger, the record behind me fell into place and a score of violins began whispering, pulsing and swelling around me as powerfully as the immense moon. In that second, I had no more doubts about the pair of them. He released her arm, opened the door of the car for her, so that its light fell for a second on her radiant smile. He shut her door, got in on his side and shot away.

I returned slowly to my armchair, my brandy and cigar, and stared into the flickering fire. Gradually the idyll rose in wave after wave to its first crescendo, until the bows of the violins were so many lashing whips of passionate sound. The lunatic! Sitting here in this silent valley, with her opposite him, listening to music like this Christmas-morning music, composed by a lover for his sleeping beloved. If it made me wish to god I were at home in bed with my wife, what, in heaven's name, must it do to him?

I suddenly remembered something that made me snatch up the record jacket. I was right. Wagner wrote that love idyll when he was fifty-seven, having fallen in love with Cosima Liszt when he was in his forties and she in her twenties; and I began to think of other elderly men who had married young women, finding them even in that tight little city a few miles away, wintering men plucking some budding rose. It is the sort of thing that can easily happen to men who have lived all their lives by the most rigid conventions and then suddenly get sick of it all and throw their hats over the moon.

I became more calm as the music slowly died in exhaustion of its own surfeit. He was as open as a book—all that talk of his about men taking the clay of life and making a self shape of it. I knew nothing of her except that he had said she lived in a roadside cottage and that, as he must know well—and he would be the first to say it—a rich stockbroker would be a wonderful catch for her.

I started to walk restlessly about the house, and, by error, I entered his bedroom. I shut the door quickly, feeling that I was floundering in deep and dangerous tides. The covers of his bed had been neatly turned down at an angle of forty-five degrees, and on his pillow there lay a red rosebud.

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I went to bed and fell into such a sound sleep that I did not hear him return.

When I woke up, it was blazing sun outside, and the cottage was empty. He had presumably gone to Mass and to collect her. When they came in, he was wearing the rosebud in his lapel. After breakfast, I took the Jaguar and drove into town to meet my Aunty Anna. . .

There was hardly a soul out along the quay where she lived. And even the gulls were silent, floating on the river or perched along the quayside walls. As I drew up outside her old fabric of a house, its railings crooked, its fanlight cracked, all the city filled suddenly with the sound of church bells. I sat for a while in the car, thinking of the Aunty Anna I knew and the best way to handle her.

She had always been a soft, slack, complaining creature, with, so far as I knew, no keener interests in life than backing horses, telling fortunes on the cups and cards, eating boiled sweets and reading violet-coloured penny novelettes. I should have brought her a box of chocolates. I drove off and managed to find a shop that sold them.

It occurred to me that it may have been this love of sweets that used to give her so much trouble with her teeth; they used to pain her a great deal, and several of them were decayed in the front of her mouth.

At that time, there was some kind of pulp, paste or malleable wafer that poor country-folk used as a dental stop-gap to hide these marks of decay. She used it constantly, and it made her teeth look like putty.

The poor woman had also had an operation performed, unskilfully, on her left elbow; she used to nurse it all the time with her fondling right hand, especially on cold or windy days. Would the poor old thing respond to the idea of going to a good surgeon? Or I could, perhaps, tempt her with some good, stout, comfortable dresses; my wife could easily get those for her. Not that I feared I would have any difficulty in persuading her to accept an annual gift.

A few minutes later, I was holding her weeping in my arms, in her one room, where she had cooked, slept and sat day after day for so many years, and as I smelled the familiar, undefinable musk of urban poverty, suggestive mainly of sour clothes, bad sewerage and fried onions, I was overcome with shame that I had not visited her once during the twelve years since I left Cork to be married. We kissed, or rather, she kissed me, as maternally as if I were still a small boy.

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Then I stood back, looked at her and got a shock of memory. She had a face like an old turtle, she was humped like a heron, and she was rouged. I noted, too, that all her decayed teeth were replaced by a denture and that her hair was tinted and blued. Like a boy, I endured the reproaches she poured over me, and then, eager to be out of that jumbled, stuffy room, I bustled her to get ready and come out to lunch at the Victoria Hotel.

She put on her fur coat and a small, ancient straw hat, gay with white daisies. Once she was dressed, she became rigid with what Cork calls grandeur, as when she said, "This is quite a nice little car," and started talking about all the much grander cars she used to drive in at the Curragh Races. At lunch, she held her knife and fork at right angles to her plate, sipped her wine like a bird, drank her coffee with the little finger crooked, and small-talked as if she were royalty giving me an audience, all of it gossip and chit-chat about the gentry of the Curragh and their fine ladies and great houses.

At the end of the lunch, she produced a compact, powdered her nose, and delicately applied lipstick. She evaded all my efforts to talk of old times until we moved into the empty lounge, where I had a brandy and she preferred a gin and lime. At last, I did lure her out of her past to her less glorious present and to my proposal that I should give her twenty-eight pounds a year (I carefully left Mel out of it) as a little gesture "for old times' sake, Aunty"—trying to make her stop being Her Majesty and become my Aunty Anna again.

She made short work of me. "No! Thank you very much. Now that I have my divvies, I don't need it."

From there we went back and forth over the whole thing, over more brandy and gin, for two fruitless hours. Gifts she would "of course" not accept. Her divvies she would "of course" not renounce. By the end of it, I had gained only one point. She said, coldly but with spirit, that if "that man" denied her her rights, she would never darken his door again. "I will have nothing more to do with this so-called Mister Meldrum. I am finished with all these fraudulent stockbrokers forever."

It was four o'clock before I surrendered, furious, rejected, humiliated, and exhausted. I drove her around the city, slowly at her queenly request, in the white Jaguar (in which, I told her, I had arrived from Dublin that morning), and ended up at her door amid a crowd of lane kids oohing and aahing at what one of them called Snow White's car.

I promised faithfully to visit her again next summer, kissed her goodbye, excused my haste by saying that I had to be back in

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Dublin before nightfall, and drove away amid the huzzahs of the tiny mob. As soon as I turned a corner, I paused to rub off her lipstick. I felt very proud of her, I despised myself, and I hated Mel and all that he and his kind stood for—by which I did not now know what I meant, unless it had something to do with the corrupting power of money over us all.

I was in no mood to face his guffaws of triumph. I parked the Jaguar on the empty South Mall and went wandering through the silent Sunday streets of this city of my youth, seeing little of it. I was angry and absorbed in trying to devise some means of helping her and, at every turn, bothered by unhappy thoughts about Mel and myself and whatever it was the years had done to us.

Was he right in saying that I knew nothing about poor people like Aunty Anna? His Sheila was a young, pretty Aunty Anna, poor like her, being drawn now, as she had been, close to the world of wealth. What did he really know about Sheila? What did I really know about him? My Aunty Anna was dead, replaced by what would have been described in one of her violet-covered novelettes as "Miss Anna Whelan, a country lady in reduced circumstances," with nothing left to her from her better days but her memories and her fur coat, defrauded and impoverished of thousands of pounds—her lost fortune would be at least that much within a matter of weeks—by a slick stockbroker. Was Mel—the Mel I knew when we were here at college together years ago—also dead?

We are not one person. We pass through several lives of faith, ambition, sometimes love, often friendship. We change, die and live again. In that cosy cottage of his, I had been the guest of a ghost. Myself a ghost? If he was a new man, his Sheila might know him. I did not. For all I knew, she was creating him. All I knew was that I must return to his cottage, as I must leave it, in silence.

I got back there in time to join him and the local curate in another of Sheila's five-to-one Martinis. Over the dinner, which was just as good as the one the night before, I left the talk to Mel and his guest—all about archaeology, birds, the proposed airport, Cork's current political gossip.

The curate left early. Mel drove Sheila home immediately after. He returned within twenty minutes.

I was standing with my hand on the high mantelpiece of the fireplace, listening to the verso of the *Siegfried Idyll*, the end of the last act of *Die Walküre*. As he came in, I raised a silencing hand, excited as I was by the heroic loveliness of this music that

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lays Brünnhilde on the mountainside in Valhalla, at the centre of encircling fires, through which a young man, who will be Siegfried, will one day break to deliver her with a kiss.

Mel threw himself into his armchair, his hands behind his head, and we listened until the music ended and the silence and the dark of the country began to hum again in our ears. For a while, we said nothing.

Then I did exactly what I had promised myself not to do. "Well?" I asked, looking down at him.

"Well?" he said, looking up at me.

"Do I congratulate you?"

"On what?"

"On your Brünnhilde."

Lazily, he rolled his head on the back of his chair.

"Meaning no? Or that you don't know?"

Again he slowly rolled his head.

"Giving nothing away? Mel, you didn't used to be so damn cautious. What has happened to you? Come on, Mel, take a chance on life. Begin by giving Aunty Anna her divvies."

"Aha! So she refused our gift?"

"She refused. Also, she will trouble you no more. She is now convinced that you are a fraudulent stockbroker who has robbed her of a fortune. Come on, man! Gamble for once in your cautious life. Stop being a fraudulent broker."

"Are you suggesting that I should let your aunt blackmail me?"

"I'm suggesting that you forget the idol you have made outside in the woodshed. It's not you. The Mel I knew can't be that fancy portrait of an unbreakable, incorruptible, crusty, self-absorbed old man, stiff-necked with principles and pride and priggishness. It's a false god. Kick it out on the rubbish heap. When you've made a real image of yourself, you'll find there is nothing so terribly frightening about giving Aunty Anna her divvies—or marrying Sheila."

I had said "frightening" because, as soon as I had suggested that he was different from whatever he wanted to be, I had seen his eyes contract, a blush appear on his cheek-bones under their grey outcrops of hair, his mouth begin to melt. With a flick, he threw away the sudden fear. "I haven't changed. I am what I am, always was and intend always to be. And if I am a prig, as you so kindly call me, I'm content to be a prig. It's better than being a dreamer like you and your mad aunt."

"Then why are you playing with the girl?"

"I am not."

"In that case, you might wipe that lipstick off your cheek."

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"You know nothing about her." He paused. "She has a boy friend. He was waiting for her again at her cottage tonight."

"I shouldn't be surprised if she had a dozen boy friends. A girl as pretty as that! Have you seen him often?"

"I have. He comes around here on his motor bicycle whenever she stays a bit later than usual. Just to offer her a lift home. Just by way of no harm. Each time, she goes off with him at once. I followed them one night. I saw them kissing under a tree. If she can deceive him, she could deceive me. If I married her, I might be unhappy all my life. I'd be jealous and suspicious of her all my life."

"You make me sick! *You* might not be happy? Why don't you say *she* might not be happy? What sort of thing do you think marriage is? One long honeymoon? Happiness is a bonus. You smuggle it. You work for it. It comes and goes. You have to be in the market to snatch it. Where's your realism? He who does not speculate cannot accumulate. Stop being such a coward! Live, man, live!"

"I prefer to be logical."

"Then you certainly will not give Aunty Anna her imaginary divvies, and you will have to sack your imaginary Sheila, and then you will be very unhappy indeed."

"I may be. It will wear off. And anyway, it's none of your damn business."

For a couple of moments, we looked at each other hatefully. Then I turned and, without saying goodnight, went to my room.

Almost immediately, I heard the front door slam. Parting the curtains, I saw him stride down the path, out into the moonlit road and around the corner, under the deep shadows of the trees, towards where we had gone yesterday to watch the kingfishers, the nesting heron and that unlikely crested, exotic bird. For a second, my heart went out to him. Then I shrugged him off in despair.

I was wakened—my watch said it was two o'clock—by the sound of music, those Brünnhildeian flames, wavering, leaping, pulsing from their mountaintop among the gods. I, in bed; he, by the ashen fire, listened to it together. After it died away, I heard his door click.

In the morning, I rose to find him in the spotless yellow-and-white kitchen, making coffee and toast for our breakfast.

"Morning, Mel!"

"Hello! Sleep well? I'm the cook on Monday mornings. She leaves everything ready, as you see," nodding to the linen, china,

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and silverware on the table. She had even left a tiny bouquet of flowers.

He was dressed for the city in his black jacket, with black-and-grey-striped trousers, grey suède waistcoat, stiff white collar, and striped shirt, a small pearl tiepin in his grey tie.

Over the coffee, he talked about birds, and for that while, he was again his old attractive, youthful, zestful self. He talked of the hoopoe, saying, "It cannot have been one—they pass us by in the spring."

When we were ready to go, he saw to it that every curtain was drawn ("The sun fades the mahogany") and every window carefully fastened, took down his bowler hat and umbrella, double-locked the door, looked all over the front of the cottage, and we drove off into another sunbathed morning.

On the way into town, we picked up Sheila outside her cottage, and after that, we did not speak at all until he dropped her at his office. I tried to insist on his not seeing me off at the station, while he insisted against my insisting, and we almost squabbled again before he gave in so far as to go into his office to ask if there was anything urgent. He took me in with him and formally introduced me to his chief accountant and his bookkeeper. While he went through his mail, I chatted with them, and noted the Turkish carpet and all his modern gadgets, and thought that this was the place where Aunty Anna began to change.

At the station, he insisted on buying me the morning papers and on waiting by my carriage door until the train left. I thanked him for our enjoyable weekend, praised his cottage, remembered the food and the wine, promised that we would meet again.

As the porters started to slam the last doors, he said, his pointed face lifted below my window, his eyes sullen above the two little tufts of greying hair on his cheekbones, "You will be pleased to hear, by the way, that I have decided to give your aunt her dividends as usual. Naturally, we go halves in that."

I leaned down from the window and grasped his shoulder. "Mel! And marry Sheila?"

"I know when I'm beaten. I'm going to give her the sack this morning. I'll have to get a new housekeeper. I am going to ask your Aunty Anna."

"But she's seventy! And a lady in reduced circumstances. She will refuse."

"Not when she sees my cottage," he said arrogantly. "I'm only there at weekends. She can imagine she is a real lady for five days in the week. And she has been a cook. And she won't tempt my flesh. Hail! And farewell!"

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The train started to puff and chug, and he and the platform slid away. Seconds later, I was in the tunnel. My window went opaque. The rancid smell of the underworld. "And farewell"? Evidently I was not to meet him ever again. It was a just judgment on my presumption; I had probed, I had interfered, I had uncovered his most secret dream and destroyed it by forcing him to bring it to the test of reality. I had been tiresome in every way. I had counted on finding the Mel I had thought I had always known, felt affronted at finding him rather different, tried to make him more different, and yet at the same time have my old Mel, and I was furious when he insisted on remaining whatever he thought he always had been.

On such irreducibly plenary moments of total mess, shame and embarrassment, the truth can only be trite, though nonetheless the truth for that. Youth knows only embryos. Life is equivocal. Life is a gamble. Friendship is frail. Love is a risk. All any man can do when fate sends some shining dream his way is to embrace it and fight for it without rest or reason, because we do all the important things of life for reasons (it has been said!) of which reason knows nothing until about twenty years after.

For that mile of tunnel, I had them all there together with me in that dark carriage, with the cold smell of steam and an occasional splash of water on the roof from the ventilation shafts to the upper world.

Then, abruptly, the tunnel shot away. I felt like a skin-diver soaring from the sea to the light of day. Green country exploded around me on all sides in universal sunlight. Small pink carts went ambling below me along dusty side roads. Black-and-white cows munched. Everywhere in the fields, men were at their morning work. I opened the window to let in fresh air, and then, with only occasional glances at the fields and at certain images, which became fainter and fewer with the passing miles, settled down to my newspapers and thoughts of my home and my work.

I have never seen him since, although we are both now ageing men; but perhaps three times, it could be four, a little switch went click in my memory and he revisited me—a dubious shadow, with two grey tufts on his cheeks and a long nose like Sherlock Holmes'. . . . No more. He did write to me once, after—not, I observed, when—Aunty Anna died, in his service, aged eighty-one. He had attended piously to everything. He enclosed some snapshots he had found in her bag: herself as a young woman, horses on the Curragh, myself as a young boy. In her will, he mentioned, she had gratefully bequeathed all her dividends to him.

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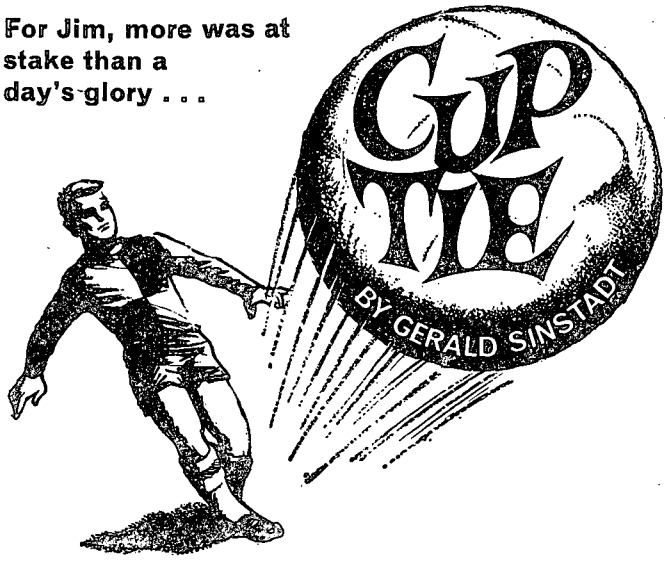
For Jim, more was at stake than a day's glory . . .



THE town woke, that long-anticipated January morning, under a thin grey blanket of rain. From the upper slopes of the hills to the north the enveloping drizzle came swirling down to fold the worn-out Victorian villas, the square brown boxes on the new estate and the long terraces of dark stone houses in a uniform drabness. The narrow streets, around the handful of small factories that provided the sole reason for the town's existence, were murky chasms in the dim dawn. This was Saturday morning and the climax of the day's excitement was still several expectant hours in the future.

When Jim Catt first stirred that morning and looked out at wet grey roofs, he groaned to himself. Then, becoming more wide awake, he remembered the day and smiled. If the frost they'd had earlier in the week had lasted he could have found himself in dead trouble come three o'clock. But not now. Now it was going to be muddy and heavy underfoot, slowing the Fancy Dans down to his pace, making every ball at least a fifty-fifty chance for the man who went in fast and hard. Jim's weather, the lads down at the ground always called it. Well, they could be right today; he was just in the mood for it.

The creased sheets beside Jim were still warm. Peggy must have only just got up. She'd be down in the kitchen brewing tea. Jim propped himself up and lit a cigarette, listening to the

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sound of a radio playing and the rattle of china from downstairs.

He'd almost finished the cigarette when Peggy came with the tea. She wore a dyed blue dressing gown and her thin brown hair was in curlers.

"Smoking?" she said, in a tone that didn't quite accuse but carried nevertheless a suggestion of reproof.

"Only the one," he said. "You know I only ever have the one on match days."

Peggy shrugged, dismissing the familiar excuse. "It's raining," she said.

"That'll be good for us."

"Us?"

"Athletic, then. You know what I mean."

"It's the only 'us' for you, isn't it? You and Athletic." She stood in front of the dressing table with her back to him and began to remove the curlers.

Jim had long ago stopped expecting his wife to take an interest in Athletic and its fortunes, but today he was feeling an old, almost forgotten eagerness that couldn't be diminished by her indifference.

He said: "It'll be all wrong for them. First Division stuff on big grounds with the crowd half a mile off is a lot different to what they'll get here. There's young lads in their side that's never known a Cup game on a small pitch. A place like this, where you can hear 'em call you a one-footed nit from the back row of the stand, it'll test 'em a bit. That, and the way the pitch'll be."

"What time'll you be wanting your dinner?" Peggy asked, as though she hadn't heard him.

"I shan't," he said. "I can't eat, not on a big match day. I never have."

"More fool you." She put a comb through her hair, touching up a wilting wave.

"I'll have a cup of tea and a few biscuits presently. It's all I'll want. I must be getting down to the ground early."

Peggy looked at him through the mirror. "Will Arthur be there?"

Arthur Barker was the club manager. He'd be there from soon after nine o'clock on a day like this. But knowing what was coming, Jim said: "Arthur? He might. There's no telling."

"If he is—will you ask him?"

Jim tried to side-step. "Look, Peg—suppose you was in

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Arthur Barker's shoes. Athletic hasn't had a Third Round Cup Tie with a First Division side for going on thirty years. They can only get just on twelve thousand in the ground and the whole town's wanting tickets. Makes no difference, they was all sold before Christmas. Arthur'll be up to his eyes. Folk after him for this and that, and like as not the Chairman flapping round after seats for the Mayor. Would you want a chap coming in the office asking about his benefit? I mean, would you?"

"When will it be, then?" Peggy was defiant, determined to press the issue. "Monday?"

"I'll ask him Monday if you want. But we'd do better to wait. See if we have a bit of a run and get some cash in. Today's gate won't pay off what's owing on the floodlights. Athletic's not Manchester United, you know."

"That was the cry when you asked last year. It's been due twelve months now."

"I know," said Jim, "but you've got to understand—"

"I understand the electric bill that's come this morning. You can't pay that on promises." In her anger, Peggy let her voice rise. "Athletic'll string you along just so long as you let them."

"Careful," said Jim, more firmly. "You'll wake Sandra."

"She'll have to know the facts of life some time."

"But she's only seven—"

"And you're thirty-seven, coming up thirty-eight. All you can do is kick a football, and soon you'll not even be able to do that, and Athletic'll not want to know you. Then how long's the Chairman going to keep you on at his place? You're not a qualified tradesman or anything. All you'll be doing is holding down a job they'll want for some other Fourth Division cast-off."

"All right," said Jim, unwilling to argue any more. "I'll ask."

"Don't ask. Demand. Have a bit of guts for once and stick up for your rights."

Jim said nothing. He stared at the ceiling, trying to recapture his earlier sense of pleasant anticipation. He didn't look as Peggy picked up the empty tea cup. Then he heard her say from the doorway: "Be warned, Jim. I've had very near enough. If you don't do something this time, I'm leaving you."

By the time he had dressed, Sandra was up and demanding to be taken to the park. They went together, hand in hand

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through the fine wash of rain, and he pushed her for a while on the deserted swings. Although Jim was withdrawn, the child seemed not to notice and kept up a cheerful babble of chatter.

On the way home, she asked: "Is Athletic going to win today, Daddy?"

He looked down at her: "I hope so, lass."

"Will you be the best player?"

"Of course," he said, with a smile. "But you won't go boasting about it at school now, will you?"

"Yes," she said solemnly.

And then, after a pause: "Daddy, why can't I come and watch you play?"

"You're too young, lass. You can come when you're older."

"But why can't Mummy take me?"

"Mummy doesn't go to football these days."

"Didn't she ever used to go and watch you play?"

"Yes," he said, remembering far-off days of hope and brave ambitions. "But that was a long time ago."

When they returned, Peggy silently poured tea into his big yellow cup and set out a plate of biscuits. She didn't speak until he rose to put on his coat just before noon. "I meant what I said, Jim. I can put up with a lot of things, but not with a man I can't respect. Just think on that."

The words stayed with him as he walked through the town. People he knew, and many that he didn't, nodded and wished him well. It was like that in a small town when a non-League side reached the Third Round of the Cup. Suddenly Athletic were bringing an excitement, a brief glow of metropolitan glamour, into a town that generally had nothing to talk about but last night's television. Visiting supporters were already roaming the streets with their black and yellow Rovers' scarves and hats and rattles, their raucous northern voices proclaiming arrogant confidence in their team. Come six o'clock they'd go home singing a different tune, if Jim had anything to do with it.

He couldn't remember when he'd last wanted to win a match as much as he did now. Not for the back-slapping and the nine days wonder of being called by his first name by Fleet Street reporters he'd never see again after Athletic had been knocked out. Not even because a good game today might help when he got around to asking about his benefit and whether they were going to sign him on again for next season. Certainly not, he reflected ruefully, for Peggy.

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He wanted to win this one for himself, to prove, just this once, that he could live with the best. When he'd moved out of the League and come to the Midlands, Jim had resigned himself to being no more than an average player: good with his head, strong in the tackle, scared of no-one, but lacking the speed and acceleration, the delicate ball control that might have taken him into the eighty-quid-a-week class. But if he could help Athletic to trim the wings of these cocky north-country Rovers, he'd have something to take out of the game with him, something to cherish in the empty days that now were not far distant.

The ground, which was in the factory district, was an uninspiring arena. To the road it offered patched-up fencing and flaking paint-work. A long, low stand with a corrugated iron roof ran along one touch-line and open terracing surrounded the other three sides.

When Jim arrived, a queue had already started to form outside, with Athletic's black and white colours predominant. There were banners bearing the optimistic slogan: *Athletic for the Cup.* Small-time touts were driving mean bargains over tickets. Some supporters, recognising Jim, called: "What's new, Pussy Catt?" using the nickname that had inevitably been his since schooldays. Jim grinned and gave them a cheerful wave.

Almost the first person he encountered inside the ground was Arthur Barker. The manager was talking to a reporter from the local paper. He looked up and said: "Hello, Pussy. You're early."

"Aye. I was wondering if I could have a word with you, boss."

Barker pushed his hat to the back of his balding head. "Hell, Pussy," he said. "Not now. Can't it wait?"

"Aye," said Jim. "It'll keep." At least he'd asked. It would be something to tell Peggy. She'd just have to be patient a bit longer.

Soon, the other players began to arrive. Most of them lived and trained away from the ground, meeting each other only on match days. They walked out, joking, to inspect the pitch. Freddie Thomas, the bulky Welsh centre-half, looked at the huge diamond of slimy mud which extend from the goalmouths out to the wings on each side of the centre line, and said: "We've got it made, Pussy. Slide tackle in the circle on this and you'll fetch up in the net, ball and all."

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"They'll know they've been in a match," said Jim.

In the dressing room, as three o'clock approached, the banter became more forced and sporadic. Jim savoured the sharp tang of embrocation, the flat smack of the ball against the concrete floor as the goalkeeper bounced it nervously, the familiar knotting of his own stomach muscles as the tension grew. This was his element, and he was never happier than now.

Arthur Barker came in for a few final words. At this level there was no room for subtlety of tactics. Four-three-three formations and the like were for sophisticated teams with opportunity to plan and rehearse together for days on end. They didn't win Cup ties for teams of ageing part-timers.

"Right, lads," he said, tilting back his hat. "Now you all know you've got nothing to lose. For a start, the weather's ours. This lot won't be able to play it about on this unless we let 'em. So I want every man in fast. Rough 'em up a bit of you like, but don't get stupid about it—we can't afford a man sent off. Just enough to put 'em off their stride. Out there it's eleven against eleven, and remember they've got more than half an eye on winning the League."

As the players filed out, Jim hung back. He wasn't particularly superstitious, but when they'd won their first qualifying tie back in September he'd been last man out, and so he'd made a point of being last ever since.

"Good luck, Pussy," said Barker, punching him lightly on the shoulder.

"Don't worry, boss. It's my lucky day."

Within ten minutes the Rovers had scored twice. Before the Athletic could settle into any rhythm or cohesion, a series of crisp passes, some long, some short, all unnervingly precise, had left their defence in bewildered disarray. Against the dismayed silence of the home crowd, the Rovers' fans set up a chant of "Easy! Easy!" As the players lined up to kick off again, Freddie Thomas was clapping his hands and shouting in his loud Welsh voice: "Steady, lads; settle down."

The response was slow in coming. But as the mud churned up, and after Rovers had missed a simple chance to go three goals ahead, Athletic suddenly found inspiration.

At left half, Jim's immediate opponent was a slim youngster called Gregory whom Rovers had bought from Swansea at the beginning of the season for fifty-five thousand pounds. Already capped seven times for Wales, he was spoken of as the natural successor to the great Ivor Allchurch. Three times

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Gregory beat Jim with a casual swivel of his hips and a sudden spurt of speed. But each time, Jim noticed, the boy liked to go outside him, working the ball on to his right foot. When he came through again, Jim stood off, waited for the body feint and then lunged, left foot extended. The timing was perfect. He came out of the tackle with the ball and immediately banged a long pass towards the corner flag where the turf was firmest.

The attack came to nothing, but Jim wasn't worried. He'd got his confidence. He knew the boy would explore other tricks in future, but he was ready to meet him. Next time, in fact, he was a fraction late and Gregory went down in a deflated heap. This tackle earned Jim an admonishment from the referee, but he saw with satisfaction that the young Welsh lad was looking a bit shaken.

As the afternoon wore on, the drizzle turned to a steady downpour and the tempo of the game slowed. Sure now that he could recover if anything went wrong, Jim started moving forward with the ball, floating high crosses into the penalty area, trying to drift them away from the goalkeeper's reach on to the head of Joe Brockley, his centre-forward.

Just as he was feeling that half-time must be imminent, he picked up a short ball from Jacky Simmons, the inside-right, ignored his cries for a return pass and ploughed forward. After ten yards he was aware of an impending challenge. The ball curled off the instep of his left boot in a sweet parabola, dropping perfectly as Brockley rose to meet it. A flick of Brockley's powerful neck muscles and the ball was in the net.

The second half was dour and bitter. Rovers, realising that the conditions cancelled out much of their superior skill, concentrated on holding their lead. Individual tussles became hard and as rugged as the laws allowed, sometimes more. Rain, still falling heavily, collected in pools that reflected the barely adequate floodlights. The baying of the home supporters grew more and more urgent as the minutes slipped away.

Another Athletic attack died in the penalty area. Rovers' goalkeeper gathered the ball and punted high downfield. As it fell, Gregory caught the ball on his thigh with the graceful assurance of a great player, turned and set off on a swerving dribble. Jim heard Freddie Thomas screaming: "Take him, Pussy, take him." Although Jim had already asked almost as much of his stamina as he felt it could give, he moved to cover.

The lithe Welsh boy glanced up, stopped with his foot on

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the ball and changed direction sharply. Off balance, Jim twisted to tackle. As he fell, he heard the bone in his right leg snap with a sharp, dry crack. Black, jagged edges of pain shivered through his body and he passed out.

It took several minutes to strap the leg and get him on to a stretcher. As he was carried round the touch-line, waves of sympathetic applause followed him and he half raised his arm in acknowledgment. But suddenly he was conscious of a new swelling roar of sound. The game had restarted and Athletic were sweeping into attack. The roar grew and finally exploded into the dark, rainy sky.

One of the stretcher bearers turned and called excitedly: "We've scored! Jacky boy's got one."

Jim lay back and closed his eyes. He felt himself being manœuvred through the dressing room doorway, and then the stretcher was lowered carefully on to the treatment table. The club doctor was feeling Jim's leg with gentle, expert fingers. From outside came a prolonged muffled sound of hoarse demanding voices. There could be only a few minutes left for play. He pictured Freddie Thomas gather the defence tightly round him, exhorting, commanding, hurling his own broad figure into the path of the Rovers' attacks. Freddie would see them through. It must be a draw now, and then there'd be a replay up north on Wednesday. But Jim Catt wouldn't be playing.

When the dressing room door opened, he kept his eyes closed. He was too weary and the pain was too sharp. He wasn't ready for them to come bursting boisterously in. Not yet.

Then he heard Peggy saying: "Jim. Oh, Jim!" He opened his eyes and she was there with her hands on his shoulders and her face against his.

"Peg," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"I've been here all the time," she said, brushing back tears. "Since half past two. Arthur sent a car. He said he wanted all the wives to be at the match."

The doctor said: "Is it hurting very much?"

"Aye," said Jim. "You could say that."

"We've rung for the ambulance. It shouldn't be long now."

Peggy stood up and opened her handbag. She took out a packet of cigarettes, lit one and put it between Jim's lips. The tumult outside seemed to recede.

Jim coughed as he inhaled the smoke.

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"The second today," he said. "But I suppose it doesn't matter now."

"Not for today, anyway," Peggy said.

"It was a right game you picked, lass."

"Oh, Jim. I'd . . ." She seemed to be feeling for the right words. "It's been such a long time. I'd forgotten. I mean, what it's like to be so proud."

The pain gripped him again, and he waited for it to subside. Then he grinned. "Well, it's the end of the road now, lass."

"No, Jim. You'll play again. Next season, for sure."

But Jim knew that he was finished. He'd seen legs go before, and at his age they didn't mend quickly enough or soundly enough for there to be even the faintest hope of a come-back.

Dimly from outside came the sound of a long blast of the referee's whistle. At once it was swallowed up in the last concerted roar of the crowd.

Soon the players would be coming in, asking questions, sympathising, and then there would be the singing and laughter in the bath, the steam and the warmth, the slow deep feeling of satisfaction. But Jim would be leaving it behind for the ambulance and a journey through the crowds as they filtered away into the darkness, with happy argument and the recollection of shared excitement to sustain them.

He heard the doctor say: "I'll just give him this injection, Mrs. Catt. It'll take away some of the pain."

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Did you get the right answers last month?

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (NOVEMBER ISSUE)

ACROSS. 1, *Home.* 3, *Acids.* 6, *Spot.* 11, *Carrier.* 12, *Claimed.* 13, *Highly amusing.* 16, *Pelican.* 17, *Legions.* 18, *Dreamer.* 21, *Propose.* 23, *Leading seaman.* 26, *Contain.* 27, *Immured.* 28, *Sort.* 89, *Congo.* 30, *Inns.*

DOWN. 1, *Hack.* 2, *Martial.* 4, *Carry on.* 5, *Decimal.* 7, *Pimento.* 8, *Tidy.* 9. *Light comedian.* 10, *Passage of arms.* 14, *Spade.* 15, *Usher.* 19, *Eleanor.* 20, *Ran into.* 21, *Pushing.* 22, *Overrun.* 24, *Aces.* 25, *Odes.*

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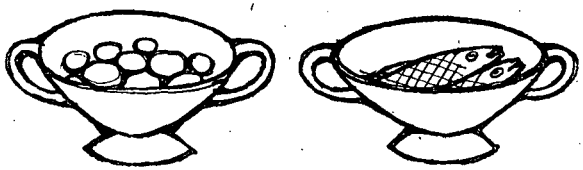
AIRS & GRACES



A SCOTTISH GRACE

Oh Lord, who blessed the loaves and fishes
Look doon upon these twa bit dishes
An' though the tatties be but sma'
Lord, mak' them plenty for us a';
But if oor stomachs they do fill
'Twill be anither miracle.

TRADITIONAL

Presently they had the mild meal she spoke of as "dinner" . . . and Stephen invoked God's blessing on two cups not quite full of broth, and some scrambled eggs. "For these and all Thy blessings—" said Stephen, towering over the empty egg-dish, his eyes closed, his hands folded, his voice sounding as if it came out of somewhere hollow.

"Amen," murmured Catherine with propriety.

Yes—it was soothing; it was what she knew.

Love, BY THE AUTHOR OF *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*

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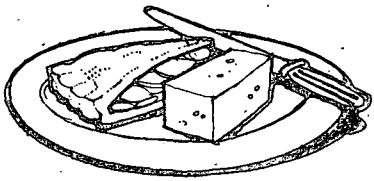
MILK AND HONEY

It is very nice to think
The world is full of meat and drink,
With little children saying grace
In every Christian kind of place.

R. L. STEVENSON, *A Child's Garden of Verses*

Some hae meat and canna eat,
And some wad eat that want it;
But we hae meat and we can eat,
And sae the Lord be thankit.

The Selkirk Grace ATTRIBUTED TO ROBERT BURNS



But I, when I undress me,
Each night upon my knees
Will ask the Lord to bless me
With apple-pie and cheese.

EUGENE FIELD, *Apple Pie and Cheese*

GRACE WITHOUT GRATITUDE

Mrs. Anderson let down her legs with a sigh and hitched her chair up to the table. Presently Mr. Anderson came in and sat with his back to the window, where he hooded his light-lashed eyes for a moment and suggested, without pressing the point, that God's holy name be praised for these and all His gifts.

Little Tom sat on a chair with two cushions and became absorbed in hiding under a lettuce leaf the meat which his mother had cut up for him.

MONICA DICKENS, *Thursday Afternoons*

Heavenly Father, bless us,
And keep us all alive;
There's ten of us for dinner
And not enough for five.

ANONYMOUS, *Hodge's Grace*

Bishop Wilberforce used to tell the story of a greedy clergyman who, when asked to say grace, would look to see if there were champagne glasses on the table. If there were he would begin, "O, most bountiful Jehovah!—" but if he saw only claret glasses he would pray, "We are not worthy, Lord, of these, the least of Thy mercies—"

ANONYMOUS, *Graduated Gratitude*

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A BLESSING

Here a little child I stand
Heaving up my either hand;
Cold as puddocks though they be
Here I lift them up to Thee,
For a benison to fall
On our meat and on us all.

ROBERT HERRICK, *A Grace for Little Children*

A-BUN-DANCE

For rabbits young and rabbits old,
Rabbits hot and rabbits cold,
Rabbits tender, rabbits tough,
We thank Thee, Lord: we've had enough.

Too Much Rabbit, ATTRIBUTED TO DEAN SWIFT

WITH RESERVATIONS

"O Lord, we thank Thee for the abundance and safe in-gathering of all our harvest, except for a few fields between here and Stonehaven . . ."

DEAN RAMSAY, *Harvest Thanksgiving*

A REPROVING PRAYER

For what we are about to receive, and for what Mr. Jones has already received, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen.

ANONYMOUS, *A Rebuke for Jones*

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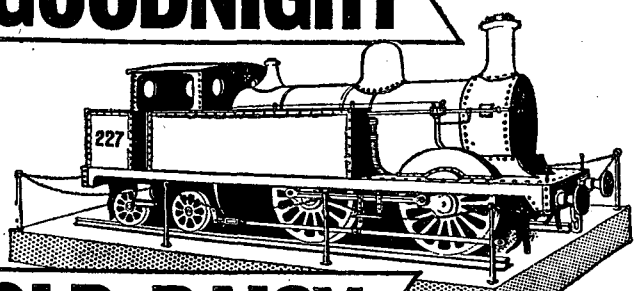
GOODNIGHT OLD DAISY



by JOHN WAIN

"I'VE told you before, you're welcome to stay at home, Father," said Mrs. Foster. Her voice was righteous but with an undertow of exasperation. "If you want to spend your days hanging about in that draughty place, you've only yourself to blame."

"Blame for what?" old Mr. Greeley asked mildly. He was moving slowly towards the front door, buttoning up his mackintosh: his cap and muffler were already on.

"If you catch your death, of course," said Mrs. Foster. "You've got a warm, comfortable home here, and goodness knows it costs me and Cyril enough trouble and money to keep it up. You could sit by the fire and read the paper, and no-one to disturb you, as long as the children are at school, and they stay to dinner now." She swept her duster in a wide arc across the already dust-free sideboard. "And you have to go out every blessed day, down to that draughty place. If you lived in the workhouse I could understand it."

Mr. Greeley paused, deeply considering her words.

"It was my life, Nora," he said at last. "I don't go down there to annoy you. But I don't want to sit by the fire all the time. I like to go down and see the old girl. It was my life, remember."

"Well, I won't hinder you if that's your idea of enjoying yourself," said Mrs. Foster. "I've told you you're welcome to stop at home. At least it's warm here, and with the cost of heating what it is that's *something*, even if you don't appreciate it."

Mr. Greeley turned his weak old eyes on his daughter and

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faced her with a faded dignity that recalled the fine man he had once been, though not to Mrs. Foster, who did not remember a time when she had not considered him old and worn-out.

"We've had this before, Nora," he said. "If I like to go down and look at the old girl, well, that's not to say I don't regard the kindness you show me, in giving me a home, you and Cyril."

"When you catch your death, you'll come to me to be nursed," she said, polishing. "They don't keep that place warm enough."

"I've never coddled myself," said Mr. Greeley. "If I should fall ill, send me to a hospital. You won't never have to nurse me."

Straightening his shoulders, he marched defiantly to the door and out. The tension produced by his daughter's nagging had caused his heart to beat fast, sending his thin blood coursing quickly through its channels, but this did little enough to warm him against the icy wind that blew round the unsheltered bus stop. He drew his mackintosh tightly round him; much worn and threadbare, it was better than nothing, and he could not afford to buy himself a new coat and would not ask his daughter for the money.

While Mr. Greeley waited, several other people gathered at the bus stop, and one of them, a woman in her thirties, greeted him.

"Going into town, Mr. Greeley?"

"Just to the Collection," he replied. "I generally go down and have a look at the old girl."

Furred and scarved against the wind, she looked at him uncomprehendingly. Nora's old dad. She'd seen him in the background when she and Don went round for an evening. Nice of Cyril to put up with him, really, and him pretty near ga-ga. The Collection? What did he mean?

"That's right," she said vaguely, her gaze travelling past the old man in search of something interesting enough to hold her attention.

The bus, coming into view, spared her any further social effort. When it halted, the knot of waiters, elevated now to the dignity of passengers, climbed thankfully into its warm interior.

"The Collection, return," said Mr. Greeley to the conductor.

The railway museum was officially known as the Phipps Historical Railway Collection, in honour of some long-dead Director who had given the funds to start it, and Mr. Greeley considered it beneath the Collection's dignity to be known as anything else. Some of the bus conductors knew what he meant, others did not; but by persevering he hoped, in time, to instruct them all.

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This morning, the conductor, a youth of about twenty, seemed not to hear Mr. Greeley. He took the fares from two other passengers and then returned with, "Where to, Dad?"

"The Phipps Memorial Collection. Ducker Street," said Mr. Greeley with careful distinctness.

"Oh, Ducker Street," said the lad carelessly. "Fourpence."

"*Return*," said Mr. Greeley doggedly.

"Oh, return. Sempunce-'ap'ny."

Mr. Greeley already had the coins ready; he paid up and sank back into his own thoughts. Ducker Street! The conductor had, it seemed, heard of the street and not the Collection. Yet the street was a short one, a mere link between two main streets at the centre of the town, and there was hardly anything else there except the Collection. But it was the street you had to ask for. A triviality, yet a straw that showed how the wind blew. Forgetfulness, forgetfulness everywhere: the great days, the great doings, blown away on the gritty wind.

The bus halted at Ducker Street, and Mr. Greeley got out and stood for a moment on the pavement. The Collection was beside the station, whose main entrance was two streets away. From the station, Mr. Greeley could hear the clash of wagons being shunted. Drawn by the sound, he hesitated. But what was the use? There was no hiss or chuff to be heard, not a plume of white to be seen; the station had been modernised and there were no steam locomotives working there now. And diesels . . . Mr. Greeley had no objection to diesels in their own way, but there was no interest in watching them. Who wanted to watch a lot of steel boxes moving about?

He went up the steps of the Collection and hurried in. The large, whitewashed building was not very warm, but it seemed so after the chill of the street, and it was possible to take off one's coat without discomfort. Mr. Greeley did so, but kept on his cap and muffler. Hanging up his mackintosh, he turned to greet the attendant who usually sat on a chair just inside the door, a taciturn, grizzled man whom he had grown to like. But instead of the familiar attendant, a new and youthful face looked at him from under a peaked cap.

"Where's Ernie?" Mr. Greeley asked.

"He's off sick," the stripling replied. "I'm doing his job till he gets back." He made no further explanation of himself: what his normal job was, where his peaked cap came from (Ernie never wore one), and how he could be spared to take over from Ernie. Was he a trainee? Was Ernie's job being kept warm for

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him? He was a non-explainer, a budding authoritarian. Mistrusting him, Mr. Greeley moved away.

Never mind! Attendant or no attendant, here she was, and here she would always be. The Phipps Collection was not very large; a few old wagons, a glass case or two containing old railwaymen's uniforms and tools, a couple of narrow-gauge engines standing one behind the other on a stretch of antique track, and a number of scale models of historic engines, some of which, if you fed them a penny, whirred sadly into motion for a little while. But all these were accompaniments, grouped on the margin. The pride of the Collection, the one big, important item that made it worth calling a Collection at all, stood firmly in the middle. Her brass gleamed, her paint shone, her majestic size drew the eye of everyone who entered. She was a gigantic green-and-gold engine of the 4–6–0 type, complete with her eight-wheeled tender. Over her huge driving-wheels, brass letters proclaimed her official name, which was that of a castle. But Mr. Greeley, in the years when he and this giantess had lived their lives together, had always called her Daisy. He could not have said why: Daisy just seemed to suit her. In his long dialogues with her, as she swayed and hissed and thundered, and the riveted metal plates shivered under his feet, Mr. Greeley had simply found himself calling her Daisy, and that was that.

He drew his hand along the edge of her long platform.

"Hello, Daisy," he said softly. "Another morning, old girl."

Daisy stood impassively: she had no means of replying. Yet Mr. Greeley did not feel that it was artificial, or even eccentric, to speak to her. Their relationship had been a living one: he had fed strength into her veins, caused her to leap and sway, heaving hundreds of tons of solid matter into urgent, clattering motion. And at the end of the run his hand had shut off her steam, calmed her, cradled her into her metallic sleep. And now she was sleeping for ever. But he was too sensible a man to fight against his own subjective feelings, and his feelings told him that he was her driver, and would always be her driver, and to her he could never be as other men were.

Stiffly, Mr. Greeley clambered up Daisy's steps and into that cab in which he had spent thousands of hours. Taking out a soft duster, he carefully polished the brass fittings that made up Daisy's intelligence, her nerve centre, the seat of her personality. Then he straightened up and took a long, calm look out of the window, first on the platform side, then on the off side.

All was clear. Except for a small, meaningless commotion on the floor of the Collection. A little figure, with jerky movements,

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looking like an insect beside the monumental locomotive, was scurrying towards them. It was the new attendant.

"No standing on the exhibits, please," he barked, hurrying. Drawing near, his face came to the level of Mr. Greeley's boots. "I must have you down, please."

"Down?" said Mr. Greeley incredulously. Could he believe what his ears told him? *Down*? Him?

"There's a notice up," said the youth firmly. "We can't allow the public to climb up on the exhibits."

"I'm not the public, lad," said Mr. Greeley. "I was this engine's regular driver for the last thirty years of her life." He spoke forgivingly: after all, it was the boy's first day on the job.

"Please come *down*," the young attendant repeated. His face was pale and stern: he might have been defending the grey head of a parent against outrage. The Collection might have been a cathedral, in danger from a barbaric horde. "Look, the regulations—"

"Fetch the Superintendent!" Mr. Greeley commanded loudly. "Go on, fetch him! I won't deal with you!"

At this moment the Superintendent, roused by the sound of their voices, appeared at the door of his office. Having many other duties, he spent only two days a week at the Collection; but this was one of his days, and Mr. Greeley knew that it was.

"What's the trouble, Perkins?" he asked, taking off his glasses with a weary gesture that was characteristic of him. He was a tall, distinguished-looking man, prematurely white-haired, and with that air of polite absence of mind that grows on museum officials. He could be softly polite to whomever he was listening or talking to, while at the same time demonstrably thinking of something else.

"Public climbing on the exhibits, sir," said Perkins stiffly. He stood like a lance-corporal.

"Dear me," said the Superintendent gently. "That's not the public, it's Mr. Greeley. He spent so long in the cab of that engine that we make an exception for him. How are you today, Mr. Greeley?"

"I'm in good shape, Superintendent," Mr. Greeley smiled. "But Daisy's in better."

The Superintendent nodded gravely. His mind was already back in his office, looking at balance-sheets. "All the better for seeing you, Mr. Greeley," he said, and turned to go back.

"My mistake, sir," said Perkins, challenging the Superintendent to make some wrapping-up comment.

"We all make them, Perkins," said the Superintendent vaguely.

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The reply did not satisfy Perkins, who had expected to be absolved, and into the bargain congratulated on his zeal. He glared briefly at Mr. Greeley, then turned and walked away after the Superintendent.

"*Public,*" said Mr. Greeley to Daisy, bitterly. "I hope we soon get Ernie back. He knows what's what." He polished some of Daisy's array of brass tubes. "*You* don't think I'm the public, eh, old girl?"

Mr. Greeley's calm had been badly shaken, but half an hour of tranquil communion with Daisy restored it. Stepping briskly, he went across the street to The Viaduct, a public house he had frequented for fifty years. There, he enjoyed his usual midday meal: a pint of beer and a sandwich. As he ate, and took slow, meditative pulls at his beer, Mr. Greeley looked round at the juke-box, the tubular steel furniture, the suggestive advertisements for non-alcoholic drinks. The place had changed beyond recognition. He had known it when it was a classic railwayman's pub. Hard-working shunters and oilers, yes, even humble porters in their shorn-off jackets, had rubbed shoulders at that bar with the drivers of famous trains. Including Mr. Greeley himself. Often and often had he come striding quickly into this pub with a raging thirst, flinging down on the polished bar a handful of small change that was almost too hot to hold. The fierce heat from Daisy's firebox used to make his overalls so hot they were all but scorched. And how he had sweated! And with what lovely, prodigal gulps had he poured down his throat pints, quarts, yes, even a gallon on occasion, of the good beer always on tap at The Viaduct!

The beer seemed to have lost its flavour these days. But then, Mr. Greeley reflected, he did not come to it straight from Daisy's cab, with his senses drugged by speed and roaring wind, his skin wet and his throat dry. Beer! It was not just beer in those days, it was a benediction. Sighing, but inwardly happy because strengthened and warmed by these memories, Mr. Greeley drank the last inch of his weak, flat pint and walked to the door, nodding to the licensee.

Back in the Collection, Mr. Greeley swung himself, once more, up the steps to Daisy's cab. From up here, the world looked sane and comely. Even if there was no track stretching ahead, even if all you could see was the flat concrete floor of the Collection, and opposite you the whitewashed brick wall. Well, that was how the world had gone. It had shrunk, and become flat and grey and washed-out. But at least he and Daisy were both still here.

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John Wain's first novel, *Hurry On Down*, appeared in 1953. It was followed by *Living in the Present* and *The Contenders*, and his reputation was quickly established. He gave up a university lectureship to devote himself to writing, and apart from novels has published poetry, critical works and an autobiography. When he is not travelling and lecturing abroad, John Wain divides his time between Staffordshire, where he was born in 1925, Wales and Oxford.

"Nobody'll ever drive you again, old girl," he said to her, bending his head so that his voice lingered intimately about her proud, immobile controls. "I was the last, and I saw you out. And I was the only one that knew what you could really do. When you *wanted* to, that is, old Daisy."

Silently, in his mind, he rehearsed the beloved statistics. Heating surface, two thousand and fifty square feet. Weight, fifty-eight tons seventeen hundredweight. The figures gleamed in his mind like the words of some immortal lyric. In their hedged-in statements they contained the whole of his working life: fifty years of eye and sinew. Work is the misfortune of Adam, laid on man by a vengeful God: Mr. Greeley in his time had cursed the alarm clock, coughed on dark mornings, ached as he waited at the icy bus stop: but never once had he climbed up into Daisy's cab without a flicker of life-giving excitement, a quickening nervous tremor at the root of his heart.

A suppressed burst of tittering, not quite so suppressed as to be inaudible to his old ears, caused Mr. Greeley to look up from his reverie. Standing by Daisy's front buffers, peering round at his face as it was framed in the driver's window, stood two children, a girl of perhaps ten and a boy some three years older.

"Now can you hear him?" the girl asked her brother. Mr. Greeley guessed that she had overheard him talking to himself, and wanted her brother to share this exquisite joke.

Seeing Mr. Greeley's eye on him, the boy dropped all furtiveness and came boldly along beside Daisy's driving wheels, which towered above him with their imperious height of nearly six feet.

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He looked directly into Mr. Greeley's face, as if about to start a conversation.

Mr. Greeley, forgiving the girlish insolence of the sister, smiled benignly down. The boy reminded him of so many similar boys, school-capped and mackintoshed, over the years. How they had longed for a few words with the driver of a crack locomotive! And even now, even in the shorn glory of the Collection, it seemed that the feeling was still alive.

"Nice engine, isn't she?" he volunteered, to help the boy over his shyness. "I was her driver. She was built in 1900. I was built some time before that, so I'm older'n she is." He smiled warmly. Then he noticed the boy's eyes. They were like two stones.

"Anything up to two hundred tons, we used to pull," Mr. Greeley proffered. Then, under the stare of those two utterly ungiving eyes, he stopped and turned away. What was the use? The boy was beyond his gravitational pull. What had drawn him to visit the Collection at all, Mr. Greeley could not imagine. What *was* clear was his complete and final unwillingness to consider Mr. Greeley as a living being of the same species as himself. Contempt, backed by a hard curiosity, had been the message of those eyes. Instead of feeling any thrill at finding himself in the presence of a man who had driven a locomotive capable of hauling two hundred tons, shooting steam high into the air, thrusting and drumming with all that wonderful lyric energy, the boy had behaved more like a particularly heartless biologist noting the reactions of some repulsive creature under vivisection.

Mr. Greeley sighed. He did not understand the world as it was now. Perhaps he had never understood it very well. Daisy had been his means of understanding the world: she had translated all experience into terms of load, gradient, pressure, curves and adhesion. So arranged, he had been able to grasp it and make sense of it. And boys like this one with his hard blue eyes, escaped from their prosperous homes on Christmas-holiday or August excursions, had recognised his authority and bowed to it. But now . . . well, everything passed. Daisy was younger than he was, but their working life had ended at the same time. Only her museum-life, that lonely twilight, would go on longer than his. But let no child look at her as this one had looked at him!

Climbing sadly down, Mr. Greeley passed an hour listlessly peering at the other exhibits in the Collection. Shadows began to gather: the misguided young attendant, loftily ignored by Mr. Greeley, switched on the lighting.

It was almost time to go back and face his daughter and her family. For some reason Mr. Greeley found it even more difficult

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than usual to accept this necessity. He felt a blind urge to hide himself in some dark corner of the Collection, wait till everyone had gone home, and then come out and spend the night in blissful, unhampered converse with Daisy. But he knew such thoughts were fantastic. At half-past five, he fetched his overcoat, put it on and buttoned it. Then, quickly, he mounted Daisy's steps one more time.

"Don't worry, girl," he admonished her. "They'll learn. They'll respect you if they don't respect me. And I'm quite happy, see? I don't matter, you know." He smoothed his hand gently over her brass wheels and levers. "Goodnight, old Daisy," he said.

Outside, the street was dark. Mr. Greeley had to wait a long time for a bus. A light, almost freezing rain was falling. Back at Mrs. Foster's house, he had very little appetite for his supper.

"You generally like egg and chips, Father," said Mrs. Foster reproachfully.

"Can I have Grandad's?" asked her watchful elder son.

"I think I'll turn in," said Mr. Greeley.

Lying in his narrow bed, Mr. Greeley felt that his bones were weightless, airy. Rising, he slumbered near the ceiling. The wind that stirred the curtain's edge caused him to waver. Then, through air that rocked like water, he was at the bus stop again. A bus was already waiting.

"The Collection," said Mr. Greely firmly, holding out a golden sovereign.

"Sorry, you'll have to ask the driver," said the conductor with the faintest hint of condescension. Without wasting words on him, Mr. Greely moved straight up to where a small window gave access to the driver. Poking his head in, Mr. Greely hissed into the driver's ear, "The Collection."

"Where's that?" said the driver, half turning in his seat. He turned no further, because Mr. Greeley's powerful hands came through the aperture and gripped his throat.

The driver choked and struggled, but Mr. Greeley said, "Follow my directions. Straight on here. Left here. Round this crossing. Right here, and right again." His fingers twined lovingly round the driver's windpipe. The driver, well-fleshed and soft to the touch, drove with imploring care. Passengers at intermediate stops were left bewildered and abandoned.

The bus reached Ducker Street, slowed, and stopped. Only then did Mr. Greeley unclasp his hands from the driver's plump throat.

"Remember next time, mate," he said grimly. "When someone says the Collection, go there and no messing."

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He left the bus with stiff dignity and walked up the steps and into the Collection. It was closed, empty and silent, but a bright moon hung in the sky, and for some reason was able to shine straight down on to the pale concrete floor. Looking up, Mr. Greeley saw that the roof of the Collection had gone. The building was open to the warm summer night: for summer had abruptly supplanted winter during the wild and perilous bus ride.

Soft air caressed the engines, the trucks, the lamps and uniforms, the glass cases. Daisy's brasswork gleamed triumphantly in the mellow light. Seen under the moon, she seemed even more colossal than in daylight.

Mr. Greeley hurried across the floor of the Collection and climbed into Daisy's cab.

"Steam up, by heaven!" he exclaimed in excitement.

Daisy's firebox glowed hot, her pipes sang, the needle of her pressure gauge crept softly round from left to right.

Then Mr. Greeley noticed that his overalls and his shiny black leather cap were hanging in the corner of the cab, on the hook where he had always hung them.

"We're due out!" he said. All at once it came back to him. "The seven-fifty down!"

His hands, steady and capable, went out to Daisy's heavy brass controls. A few calculated turns on this wheel, a sharp downward pull on that lever. The wheels came into motion. Daisy's whole frame heaved and shook with excitement as her massive connecting-rods began to slide back and forth.

"Where's Ginger?" Mr. Greeley asked irritably. He looked round for the fireman he had had on his first runs in 1920. Then he remembered. It wasn't Ginger, it was young Herbert. Or was it Harry Jackson? The last one?

Twisting round, he saw a figure crouched beside the coal, shovel in hand. The stance was Harry Jackson's. That was how Harry had always stood, shovel at the ready, one calculating eye on the firebox door. But the face was Ginger's.

"You've come back, Ginger," said Mr. Greeley calmly.

"Yes, gaffer," said Ginger. "I wanted to be by the firebox again. It's cold out there."

Out where? Mr. Greeley wondered. But he turned his attention to the controls again. Daisy was rising easily into the air, floating steadily upwards. The Collection fell away behind them, and Mr. Greeley thought he glimpsed the Superintendent standing alone in the space Daisy had occupied, looking up at them wonderingly, fumbling in his upper pocket for his glasses.

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Then there was a jolt as Daisy's wheels hit the track. There it was, stretching ahead of them in the glorious moonlight—a mile, three miles, five, ten miles of straight rails.

"The road!" Mr. Greeley breathed. He fed Daisy more pressure. And more. And more. The miles whipped by, and Mr. Greeley and Ginger shouted for joy in the shuddering cab.

"She's pulling a treat!" Ginger called.

"Clean!" Mr. Greeley shouted.

He remembered now. Daisy had been in for servicing. Her boiler had been scraped out. He could never understand why clean water left so much deposit, but it did. Well, they had done a fine job. She had never pulled more smoothly.

"A hundred and seventy," said Mr. Greeley to himself, looking at the pressure gauge. "Well, why not?" And he increased the pressure till the needle stood at a hundred and eighty.

"Better stop there," said Mr. Greeley. He peered ahead through his window. The track stretched away into an inviting landscape of trees and fields. No curves of less than two miles' radius on the whole stretch. He remembered it: his favourite run. But what was different about it? Oh yes—the housing estates had gone. These woods and meadows had been gradually shovelled away, during the years he and Daisy had travelled that road, and hundreds of little brick boxes had sprung up, connected by concrete ribbons and towered over by glaring arc-lights. Now, all that was gone, the trees waved softly in the moonlight and threw their shadows on to the broad fields. Mr. Greeley blew Daisy's whistle, and he could imagine the sound echoing to lonely farmhouses along with the bark of a fox and the cry of an owl.

But of course, it was no mystery. The time that had bowed him to old age was rolled back, he and Daisy were young again, the trees had not been cut down and the meadows still gleamed under the moon. Rolling up his sleeves, Mr. Greeley noticed at once that his arms were more fully fleshed. The stringy old man's muscles had rounded out into the firm, contoured strength he had once taken for granted. And all at once Mr. Greeley knew that he would never be old again. He stood straighter, he saw more clearly. Daisy, in all her thundering power and bulk, seemed to submit to him like a bride. And back home, he knew, Marion waited for him. This evening, at the end of the run back, he would get the bus home and Marion would be waiting. He would take off his working clothes, and wash, and eat, and later that night they would love each other as they used to do.

Daisy rolled easily along at sixty miles an hour, her pressure

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steady at a hundred and eighty. The track went into a long, full-speed curve, and Mr. Greeley took the opportunity to look back and see the train they were pulling. Twelve coaches and a guard's van.

"Thirteen," said Mr. Greeley and grinned. That was a superstition that had never bothered him.

Daisy's smoke plumed above them, the steel plates shuddered beneath, the dark trees flew by and the wind roared past their ears. Ginger leaned on his shovel, and he and Mr. Greeley grinned at each other with utter contentment. Soon the run would be over; in some unexplained way, in fact, they were already on the return trip, and Marion would be putting the pie in the oven and beginning to watch for the bus that would bring him home.

Standing over Mr. Greeley, the young doctor shook his head at Mrs. Foster and her husband.

"His resistance is weak," he said. "You can't expect anything else at his age. We can get him into an oxygen tent, and he might rally or he might not." He rubbed his eyes. It was a continual annoyance to him that people seemed to wait for his turn on night-duty before deciding to die. Why couldn't they die at weekends?

"We must do everything we can, of course," said Cyril Foster. Inside, he felt a sensation of lightness and relief of which he had the grace to feel slightly ashamed. With the old man gone, that back room could be very useful. The children could have it as a rumpus room. They'd always wanted a rumpus room.

Things happened very quickly after that. Mrs. Foster shed a few genuine tears. Their eldest child, Arlene, appeared on the landing and was shooed back to bed by Mr. Foster.

"Poor old Dad," Mrs. Foster whimpered. "They didn't keep any heating on in that place."

"Course of nature; seventy-five years is a long time," said the doctor.

"Goodnight, old Daisy," said Mr. Greeley.

The ambulance arrived. Mr. Foster went down and opened the door. The ambulance men joked as they came up the stairs. They got Mr. Greeley on to a stretcher and carefully started to go back the way they had come. Arlene appeared again and was whisked back to bed by Mrs. Foster. Mr. Greeley died. Mr. Foster held the front door open as the ambulance men carried the stretcher gently out. The doctor said, "He may rally or he may not."

And the great locomotive, standing silent and imprisoned on the cold grey floor of the Collection, entered another phase of its history.

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your attention please

for some slightly roguish remarks by GEORGE MIKES

MARRIAGE is not a bad institution but a great deal depends on choice of a partner. There are two occasions when people are prepared—indeed eager—to discuss their marriage partners: before marriage when she (or, of course, he) is a perfect angel, a beauty, an epitome of kindness, magnanimity, fidelity and all other virtues; or again when a marriage breaks up and he/she is the most awful bitch/beast who ever trod the earth, repulsively ugly, shapeless, vicious, conceited, inconsiderate, selfish, promiscuous, a nagger and a bully. After twenty-three years of marriage, people describe their spouses in a way that makes you fail to understand how they could bear to live with them for twenty-three minutes.

Once, many years ago, I went to see Sir Alexander Korda. I had not seen him for a long time and his first question was, "How is your wife?" My first wife used to be his secretary for years and I ought to have remembered that; but I had been

ON MARRIAGE, MONEY, AND...

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married to my present wife for a few years then, and when someone spoke of my wife, well, I thought of my wife. Having talked at cross-purposes for a few minutes, our mistake became obvious and Korda burst out laughing.

"Although I have just now broken my own golden rule," he said, "I'll give you one excellent piece of advice for life. Never, but never ask anyone how his wife is."

He added, "It's usually another wife, in any case."

I have always kept to his advice and never asked. He was right, you can never be sure. You may have seen them as a loving couple the night before, but when you ask the husband next day, at lunchtime, "And how is Adelaide?", his face can nevertheless darken and he can reply, "*That* horrible bitch? I don't know and I don't care." No-one will be hurt if you do not ask him how his wife is.

And another word of wisdom to add to Korda's. If one of your friends bursts out decrying, abusing, and vilifying his wife, just listen to him in silence and say nothing. Do not disagree with him because he may become violent; but still less agree with him. Don't say, "At last, Harry. Quite frankly, I never understand how you could put up with her. Besides, she slept with half Kensington. The male half, I mean." Harry may or may not like your remark at that moment. But the odds are that the two of them will make it up, he will repeat it to her, and neither of them will ever speak to you again. Not until the next break, at any rate.

When people discuss the failings of their spouses, they are, as a rule, civilised enough to introduce their censure with a remark like, "Well, I know I'm not perfect myself." What they really mean is this, "Well, I know I am perfect myself; indeed I am so tolerant that I do not expect perfection from anybody else. But that creature is really below the limit."

This is, in any case, the wrong approach. You do not want, you do not *need* a good—let alone perfect—wife. (Or husband, I repeat: I am speaking of both.) There is no such thing as a good wife. The lady who is a good wife to you may drive A or B into the madhouse in no time. In marriage there are not absolute values, only compatibility. Few people would regard a sadist as an ideal husband. "Imagine poor Lydia, what rotten luck! Giles turned out to be a sadist." But if Lydia happens to be a masochist, then Giles *is* the ideal husband for her.

Marriage is not only sex. (How did Mrs. Kinsey put it? "I don't see much of Alfred since he got interested in sex.") A generous wife cannot stand a mean husband. If one spouse acts

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on the other as a reasonable brake, this may work; but union between a spendthrift and a miser is doomed to failure. Two misers, however, may hit it off splendidly. (So also may two spendthrifts if they have enough left to live on.)

Two compulsive talkers will grow to hate each other; but if a compulsive talker meets an attentive listener or a person who can give the impression of listening while she is able to switch off and think of more interesting subjects, they may grow old together.

Some people cannot exist without admiration; others are born hero-worshippers. If they meet, all will be well; but let two of a kind marry and disaster is sure to follow. A brute may be ideally suited to one of those born martyrs; a thief will be blessed by a receiver. There is no fault, sin, defect, even depravity which cannot be gratified by the corresponding virtue or corresponding fault and depravity. Never look for the ideal husband. Give the ideal wife a wide berth. Run away fast if the species is even mentioned. All you want is a big-eyed hero-worshipper if you are a detestable show-off; a compulsive giggler if you are the life and soul of the party type; a born nurse if you are a hypochondriac.

Nothing is less private than marriage. Marriage is of public concern; your marriage is everybody's business.

When I was a boy (judging by the level of the stories which I found wonderful then, not—I hope—more than nine), I read a piece in a boys' paper in which the hero, the eternal duffer, was invited to a ball. The invitation clearly stated *"No entrance fee"*. He went; he danced; he left. However, when he was about to leave the premises, he found his way barred by a six-foot-four doorman. "I was told there was no entrance fee," he mumbled. "That's true," the doorman replied. "But there is an exit fee, ha-ha-ha . . . You can't leave before you pay it, ha-ha-ha . . ."

Marriage is like that. Any silly young couple may walk into the trap, no matter if they've known each other for only two hours, no matter how drunk they both are. They may be madly in love—in other words blind and completely incapable of judging each other's suitability. Nevertheless, as soon as they have signed the register, their marriage becomes sacred and the grave concern of society. A matter of public policy. Holy matrimony between a slightly backward teenager and an equally young nymphomaniac makes them pillars of society. A look at our society suggests that perhaps it *is* supported by such pillars.

Marriage is so important that it cannot be dissolved except by one of Her Majesty's Justices of the High Court. One of Her

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Your marriage is everybody's business

Majesty's Justices of the High Court. One of Her Majesty's County Court judges will not do for the purpose. Marriage is much too sacred for a simple county court judge. So the very same county court judge is appointed a Special Divorce Commissioner. He sits in the High Court dissolving about twenty-five or thirty sacred marriages per hour at the cost of £110 instead of £11 (which might be the cost in the County Court). At this price the simple county court judge has ceased to be simple. At £110 he has become a wise competent archon and arbitrator. "There is an exit fee, ha-ha-ha . . . You can't leave before paying that, ha-ha-ha . . ." Society needs pillars. And also money.

MONEY is one of the most complicated phenomena in the modern world. Money for most people means something other than it is. It means almost everything, except money.

That's why it is so difficult for the ordinary chap to become a millionaire. It is easier, of course, to make a million or two than ever before but it still requires effort. (It was in Texas that I heard the old phrase used with complete seriousness and without a twinkle in the eye. I asked whether a man I knew was a millionaire. My informant, a multi-millionaire ranch-owner himself, nodded seriously, "Yes, he *is*. But only a poor millionaire.")

Even here, in England, it is perhaps more difficult to acquire a

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proper millionaire's outlook than to acquire the million itself. The millionaire—industrial and commercial, that is, I am not referring to the Beatles and other exceptional beings—must be devoted to money-making and thinking of nothing else. He must be acquisitive, aggressive, nasty, pompous and vain. One of them told me once, "You have a certain talent for writing. Others have a talent for painting or music. My talent is for money-making. It is as simple as that. You must not think that simply because my talents lie in this field, I am a better man than you." I hastened to reassure him that this thought had never crossed my mind.

Another gentleman, reputedly the richest man on earth, has had a coin-box telephone installed in his house, for the use of his guests. The reason for this is that one of them had, allegedly, put through a phone call to New York at his host's expense. Of course, a call to New York means less to this man than a local call by one of my guests would mean to me or to most of my readers. Yet he did not hesitate to offend all his future guests; and these insulted guests do not hesitate to accept his invitations. The point is that a real millionaire with the true millionaire's attitude, hates the idea *of being taken advantage of*. "I hate being taken advantage of" is a phrase I have heard more often than any other from these people.

That's the chief reason why I should make such a poor millionaire. I should love to be taken advantage of. If I had a few hundred million pounds—I know what I'm going to say will sound reckless to all millionaires—I would not mind spending an extra shilling or two on my friends' and guests' pleasure. If any of them wanted an extra piece of cake, an extra glass of champagne or an extra telephone call to New York, I should be delighted to be able to treat him to it. I should be enormously pleased if others, too, enjoyed my vast riches. That is, of course, the wrong attitude. Your guest does ring up New York and then your fortunes dwindle from £397,895,327 to a mere £397,895,322 and that is just below the safety margin.

I knew a millionaire who spent long and anxious hours weighing his luggage because if he had been required to pay an excess luggage fee of £1, his holiday would have been ruined. Another millionaire admitted in a television programme that he had queued up outside a night club and waited till ten o'clock because admission was a few shillings cheaper after ten. It was a small sum, he agreed, but as the time was "quite near" ten, paying the higher admission fee would have been sheer waste; and "waste is stupid and wicked."

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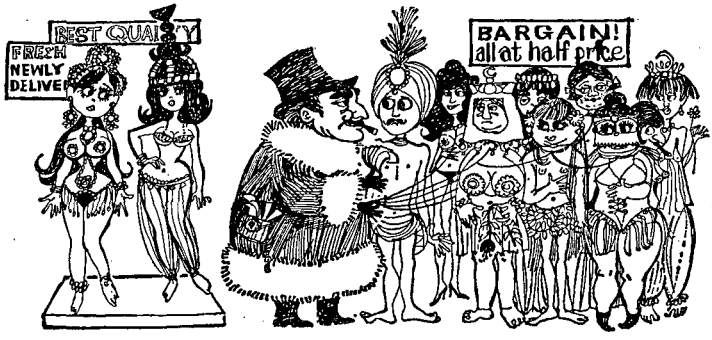
I knew another extremely rich gentleman who was a splendidly generous host, gave opulent house parties every week, pampered his guests in every possible manner but cheated like hell at rummy. Everybody noticed it but he just *had* to win his three or five bob every Saturday and Sunday night. He did not really need five bob; but he needed the glory.

I know poor people who would never dream of going anywhere by any means other than by taxi; and I know very rich men who would not hesitate to do the bus company out of fourpence and risk being caught. (They could always say, "Me? Cheating to save fourpence? Ridiculous!") I know poor men who refused to accept commission from friends; and I know one millionaire who introduces customers to his wife (the introduction is always couched in social terms) and then claims twenty-five per cent commission from her. I repeat: twenty-five per cent and from his own wife. He says his action is educational: she must learn that one has to pay for everything in life. (Having been married to him for twelve years, she has probably learnt that by now.) The gentleman in question is not ashamed of this grabbing: he is proud of it, regales his friends with the story and expects to be admired for his cleverness.

Millionaires have another stupid anxiety: they want to be loved for their own sake. In old-fashioned films (their vogue will, no doubt, return) twenty-year-old beauty queens are shown about to marry aged and shrunken fools, doubled up by gout. The old man—a multi-millionaire, of course—disguises himself somehow in order to find out if the girl really loves him for his own sake. My personal guess is that she does not; I'd risk a wager that she is after his money. Here again I would make a rotten millionaire. My life-long ambition has been for dazzling,



Money is much better than a beautiful woman

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young beauty queens to love me for my money. For countless millions, my castles, my yachts, my Rolls Royces, my country estates. But there's not a hope! They all love me just for my own sake.

For many money means love. Money is not love, of course, but it is a pretty good substitute. To others it means power and glory and kudos. It is the sheer joy of possession which intoxicates yet another kind. For a fifth type the acquisition of money is reassurance: it means they must be clever fellows, superior to others if they could make such a pile. (At the bottom of their hearts they always have a teeny-weeny doubt about themselves.)

There is a considerable layer of the population who talk of money day and night, who have no other topic and no other thought; no other values and no other yardstick. They breathe money, worship money, dream of money, smell of money. Some mad compulsion makes them chase more and more money, just to increase their riches on paper. Money is to be worshipped for its own sake, like a beautiful woman. But it is much better than a beautiful woman. Money always obeys you; it never talks back; it is hardly ever unfaithful to you. And if your fortune grows larger—unlike a beautiful spouse growing larger—it does not matter.

And it is here that the Keynes-Mikes Theory comes in. Frankly, it has very little to do with my illustrious predecessor, John Maynard Keynes. It is all Mikes. But it struck me that it would enhance the theory's prestige and lend it more respect if I added Keynes' name to it.

The theory itself, however, is revolutionary. It is worthy of Keynes; he has no reason for complaining. In addition to being a brilliant theory, it also solves the problem of inflation once and for all—a problem no other economist succeeded in solving before Keynes and myself. The theory simply discovers the real role of money. No economist has ever given this advice: SPEND IT! Don't use money as love, power, glory, proof of your brilliance, sexual potency, and what-not. *Use it as money.* This is the only safe cure for inflation, whatever the orthodox economists may say. If you want to make sure that your money does not lose its value, *enjoy it!* Money is not for piling up; not to show how clever you are; not to show how potent you are—*money is for spending.*

The only way you can save money from devaluation is by enjoying it. Once you have enjoyed a good meal, a nice trip to Asia Minor or the fjords of Norway, a pleasant evening in the company of a lovely woman or of your debauched companions,

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absolutely no subsequent fluctuation of the Zurich money-market will ever diminish your enjoyment. That trip, that dinner, that woman is yours; it remains yours. It was not a waste; it was investment. Investment of the wisest kind: investment in experience; investment in life; investment in yourself. A full life of experience and enjoyment makes you richer; money in the bank makes you poorer.

...AND SEX

SEX is over-estimated in our lives." This is a fashionable saying nowadays. Considering the fact that without sex there would be no life, it is not easy to see how sex can be over-estimated. Nevertheless, this age is supposed to be madly interested in sex.

A friend of mine—a barrister—returning from a conference abroad, decided to buy a light novel at Munich airport. At the huge bookstall, he complained, there was not a single book either in English or in German which was not semi- (or entirely) pornographic. Perhaps an unimportant observation in itself; but, surely, a significant symptom. We hear so much about sex-crimes, the spread of four-letter words in literature, teenage sex, etc., etc., that we are inclined to believe that it is this generation —this Age of Affluence—that has discovered sex.

This is not so. Sex was already known in the Middle Ages. The early medieval Church Fathers were all obsessed with sex, could hardly think of anything else and condemned sexual practices three times a day, every day. Perhaps they did not like sex; but they certainly liked to talk about it. In any case, they did not succeed in extinguishing the practice entirely, not even among Christians, although until Hyde Park was opened in London, sex used to be practised in private.

It is difficult to trace the origins of sex practices. The Romans and the Greeks were ardent practitioners. Historians believe that it was the Phœnicians who invented sex. They invented it almost immediately after inventing the alphabet. In fact, the alphabet was nearly lost and forgotten because those early Phœnicians got so much more interested in sex than in writing. (It should be added in all fairness that the quality of their sex was much superior to the quality of their writing.)

It was the Babylonians who discovered that sex and literature, far from being mutually exclusive, are complimentary. Once dirty literature had thus been born, neither sex nor literature ever looked back.

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Sex was already known in the Middle Ages . . .

Some people, while admitting that sex was not actually discovered by this age, insist that it is more exciting, more important, more beautiful today than ever before. This, too, is a mistake. I stopped a number of people near Chelsea Bridge—as I have learned to do from television interviewers—and asked them what they thought of this matter. I chose mostly elderly people, because it is only the elderly who can compare our age with former ages. Here are some of the replies:

W.B.S., accountant, aged 87: "It is absolute nonsense. Sex was much better before the First World War. It was more important, too. Definitely more important."

T.F.A., solicitor, aged 83: "The truth is exactly the opposite. Sex has lost all its significance and excitement in the last thirty years. Say twenty-five. Well, say fifteen."

P.M.B., retired haberdasher, aged 92: "Women were much more beautiful and more desirable at the beginning of the century. Nowadays they are not worth looking at."

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WHODUNIT?

Argosy quizzes your knowledge of mysteries, suspense stories and thrillers

1 Who is popularly considered to be the father of detective fiction?

2 What is the name of the first book in which Sherlock Holmes appears? When was it published?

3 Complete the titles of the following mystery novels and thrillers: (a) *From* ——, *with Love*; (b) *The* ——*stone*; (c) ——*'s Last Case*; (d) *The* —— *File*; and (e) *The* —— *in the Rue Morgue.*

4 Which author calls his thrillers "entertainments"? Can you list four of them?

5 Who is A. A. Fair?

6 Which authors created the following detective characters: (a) Hercule Poirot, (b) Father Brown, (c) Lord Peter Wimsey, (d) Bulldog Drummond, (e) Sam Spade, (f) Lemmy Caution and (g) Philip Marlow?

7 He wrote *Call for the Dead* and *A Murder of Quality* before his most famous thriller appeared. What is his name?

8 Which well-known thriller-writer was also a statesman?

9 Name the authors of these novels: (a) *Dancers in Mourning*; (b) *Busman's Honeymoon*; and (c) *Green for Danger*. What have they all in common?

10 Who is Ellery Queen?

11 Four of Raymond Chandler's novels have been made into famous films. Do you remember which?

12 Which fictional character crumbles into dust after being stabbed twice?

answers are on page 153

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He had left the sun and the hills to dig for gold; but love was calling him back . . .

By TOM MACDONALD

STRETCHING his long limbs in the concrete bunk, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes with his knuckles, Philomen smiled as he listened to the men waking. The last day on the gold-mine. Tomorrow he was going home to Zululand, to the Valley of the Thousand Hills, to the smile of Nandi.

He heard the voices of the mine. It was never silent. The click-clack of the wheels of the cocopans coming and going on the grey-white mine dump. The everlasting hum of wires. In the first filter of dawn the men were waking as if to a clock.

He looked across to the opposite bunk as Benjamin cleared his throat. He was big, crinkly-haired, brown-eyed, powerful like Philomen. They could be taken for brothers.

They grinned at each other.

"Did you sleep well, brother?" asked Benjamin.

"I slept well, brother," said Philomen.

"And you dreamed of the Valley?"

"Of course."

Benjamin scratched his bare chest. "It's your last day."

"Isn't it wonderful?"

"Wonderful for you."

The men uncoiled themselves from the cocoons of their blankets. Philomen was humming.

"You can sing," someone said, "because you're going home to sit in the sun."

"In the sun," cried Philomen.

He and Benjamin sat on their haunches round a big kaffir pot. They dipped their hands in and rolled the mealie meal into balls

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and shoved them into their mouths. Then they went out into the sun. They didn't wear blankets. Zulu men didn't. They were never cold.

"We got to go to the post office," said Philomen.

"Yes," said Benjamin.

There was a written letter for Benjamin, but no letter for Philomen. He went sulky.

"Nandi said she would write on the last day," he said. "She promised me a special letter in beads."

"Perhaps it will come tomorrow, Philomen."

"When I'm gone."

"You know, Philomen, it takes long to write in beads as Nandi does."

Philomen considered that. "Of course," he said, "but I'm glad she writes in beads. Then the letters last for ever. Not like the paper your Shala writes on. The ants eat paper. Nothing eats beads."

From the veld they looked at the winding gear of the mine.

"It still looks to me as if it was made by spiders," said Philomen.

"But it's made of steel," said Benjamin.

"I know, but I'm so happy because I'll never see it again."

"How do you know? Perhaps you'll be glad to come back to the mine."

"Never. But I'll remember it. I'll remember the bones of this country in the koppies."

They watched the mechanical tipping of the cocopans on the mine dump.

"I laughed when I saw them first," said Philomen, nodding at the line of cocopans. "The way they turn over without a hand to push them. They still make me laugh."

He laughed and Benjamin joined him. They laughed like children.

Then they lit their pipes, and sitting on the grass on the koppie, they looked to the faraway city.

"It's a wonder that I didn't break my neck when I looked up at the tall buildings that time when I saw them first," said Philomen.

"Me too," said Benjamin. "The white man makes the city grow quickly."

"Who cares, Benjamin? I know a valley in the thousand hills."

Benjamin grimaced. "Don't make my heart weep, Philomen."

"The little round huts," said Philomen. "The folds of the hills. The cattle and the calling of the piccanins. No, I'm never coming

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back, Benjamin. I've enough to buy the lobola oxen for Nandi. I've dug for gold and never seen a bit of it. It doesn't make sense at all."

"Gold is money, Philomen."

"But it's dead in the rock, Benjamin. Now when you talk of cattle or corn, that's life. And real kaffir beer, soft on your throat."

"Philemon, don't make me sad."

"The mist on the thousand hills, Benjamin. Like blankets."

"Don't make me cold in the sun."

"No doors on the huts, Benjamin, because there are no thieves. And when I get home Nandi will be wearing the black ox skirt to tell the world that she is betrothed. And no more shall we have to be like scorpions in the veld, Nandi and me. She is slim like a golden sugar cane. Her skin is smooth like water. Gold in her eyes. Her breasts pointed like sharp arrows. She told me that in a bead letter. It read, 'My breasts are sharp arrows pointed towards you'."

"You are like all men, Philomen. Every man thinks that his first girl is the only star in the sky."

"But Benjamin, you should hear her laugh. She has a tongue like a bell."

They went silent, smoking. Then they took a nap, falling asleep easily. They woke together and went back to the compound. They took a plate of stewed meat and then prepared to go down the mine.

Philomen put on heavy boots, the tin hat with the lamp, the oilskin coat. He was one of a crowd in the cage, dizzying down and down. Clang at the bottom. Doors opened as smooth as oil. The electric lights hit his eyes. But for the last time.

It was as the mine boys were chattering in the cocopans which ran on electric cables into the levels, for they had to travel some distance to the rock face, that Philomen remembered his dream. How could he have forgotten it?

He had been climbing one of the thousand hills and his heart was singing in the glory of the morning, when a shout warned him. It was the voice of Nandi. He saw a big rock hurtling down and he threw himself into the shelter of a rock as the stone missed him.

Now in the clatter of the mine he knew it was a warning. Cold sweat prickled him. He must be alert all through the shift. The last shift. Flicker of lamps. Shining tin hats. Light shining on the whites of their eyes.

They moved into groups and took their places where the rock

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had been shot into huge wounds by dynamite. Rocks without a speck of gold in any of them. It was always so. The men were half naked. Shovelling quartz into the cocopans. Bang and clang in clouds of dust.

It was oven-hot now. Rivers of sweat and snuffles of laughter. Philomen worked like a machine, with no feeling, no ache. In the beginning it had been hard. One of the men started a song and they shovelled to the rhythm. It was always easier to work to a song. It told of a black man who had left the sun to dig for gold, but how one day he would go back to the sun for ever.

O Valley of the Thousand Hills, he thought, where the moons come as yellow as butter, I'm coming home. After tonight when I turn my face in thanksgiving to the stars, the soft grass of the valleys will be under my feet for ever. I'll walk in my bare feet. I'll kiss the face of the earth and forget that deep down it has a belly like the grave.

And there will be piccanins for Nandi and me, and they'll be as dark as chocolate.

He saw again the strange city where a man had to walk warily if he was to avoid being killed by a car. Cars. All the cars in the world, he'd be telling Nandi. You had to be wary too because of the human jackals, who robbed men even of their clothes and their boots. You had to be careful of knives in dark alleys. You had to be wary of the cheap women in the liquor shebeens.

But soon to walk the hills with no fear. To walk on grass without boots until you die.

They had their breaks away from the dust and the wounds of the stope. And Philemon told Benjamin of his dream.

"So we must be careful," said Benjamin. "The rock wants to kill us."

"But it was my dream, Benjamin."

"Am I not your brother?"

"Always you will be my brother."

They had washed the dust down with cold water. They had eaten bits of meat from their food tins. They were refreshed and they went back to their work singing.

In a gap of silence, Philemon laughed. It was like a shot.

The white boss bawled, "Are you going mad or something?"

"He's laughing because he's going home tomorrow, Boss," one of the men said.

"Oh. Now I see," said the white man. "How I would laugh too if I was going home for ever to the farm."

Philomen had laughed remembering how Nandi had proposed to him first. Nandi's brother, a piccanin, had come to him in the

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fields, and he had given him a piece of beadwork. It read, "How I would like to gather pumpkins in your garden."

If she gathered pumpkins in his garden she would belong to him. For a long time he had worn that letter on his wrist. It was now only one of many bead letters he kept. He stood up and, caught in the light of the lamps, he was like a black waterfall.

He bent back to work and told the beads of his memories.

Nandi of the golden eyes, I'm coming on the long winding road from Johannesburg. We shall go to the pools to swim. The sun will bite us. I shall build a marriage hut with golden reeds. I shall buy you a white ox, for white is the colour of joy.

Now he was the sun of the valley and the clouds were his flocks of sheep and herds of cows in the blue pastures of the sky.

He was leaning on his shovel when he heard the first faint crack. "Waw," he roared and caught Benjamin by the neck and dragged him back. Then he crouched and ran. He heard the great rock split, cry, crash, drowning the cries of some of the boys. He squeezed his nostrils to keep out the dust. Shale went on falling from the rock and the roof of the mine shuddered.

There were many men around. Many lamps. Lot of talk. Some had died. He and Benjamin were holding hands. It was the first rock burst Philomen had seen or heard. When tremors shook the earth, and they safe on top, some of the men would say, "The rock has killed somebody."

It seemed to Philomen that the mine had struck like a wounded animal, pounced like a lion, meaning to kill.

The shift was called off. When they reached the top in the swift cage it was evening and the skies were scarves of colour.

"But for your dream we'd have been dead men," said Benjamin.

"I'll always be grateful to Nandi for that dream," said Philomen.

"I'll thank her too when I see her, Philomen. I mean to be at your marriage feast."

"That will be good. And now let's go to the post office."

"It is closed."

"But Izak the Zulu will give me the letter if there is one."

Izak was sitting in front of the small post office on two chairs. He was three-chinned and he himself said that he was the fattest man in the world.

"Your letter has come," said Izak. "You're lucky to be alive to read it from what I hear."

From a long pocket he took a small parcel. Philomen undid it.

"What does she say?" asked Izak. Philomen hedged. "You

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needn't be shy," said Izak. "I had most of my love letters in beads. And sometimes from three girls at a time."

Philomen said, "She says, 'My heart is white towards you, sweetheart. My sweet lover, I have been waiting for your return. My dearest, I am as thin and slender as a sweet cane in a damp field. Therefore my heart is sore. It is beautiful now that you have the lobola cattle'."

Izak sighed.

"There is another little one," said Philomen. "It says, 'My heart will always be good towards you. How I have envied the dove that pecks on your doorstep'."

Then there was the twisted string running through the pattern which read, "At last you are coming back on the long, winding road from Johannesburg."

"Zulu girls," said Izak, "they write the beautifullest letters in the world."

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"But I told you, he's no singer, he's a dancer!"

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The Brothers

BY L. WOIWODE

"WHAT is it?"

The older brother, who is seven, narrows his pale-blue eyes and judiciously evaluates the sheet of paper. "This is a house," he says, and places his finger at the bottom of the paper where there is nothing. "These are the people living in it." His squint, critical and fierce, makes wrinkles appear beneath his faint eyebrows, and the younger one tries to copy the look, hoping it will endow him with the superior vision his brother apparently has.

"I can't see anything."

"Naturally. It's invisible." Which seems to remind him of something. He takes up the clean pen, dips it into the ink eradicator, and holds it poised above the paper. He is kneeling in a chair at his father's tall roll-top desk, in a stream of afternoon sunlight that bleaches his blond hair white and makes his angular features look even more like an old man's. Before he lowers the pen, he does a sort of waddle on the seat of the chair, settling his weight down to serious business.

The younger brother, his hands locked behind his head, rests both elbows on the writing surface of the desk. He looks at his brother's eyes, at the downward curve of his heavy lips, and then at a leaf of reflected sunlight resting in the hollow of his cheek. When the older brother is absorbed as he is now—when he practises the piano by himself or when they are playing duets, and especially when he has to rehearse for a reading—he turns extremely pale, as if a part of him were bleeding into his task.

The two of them have been initiated young into the theatre by their parents (both of whom were actors at one time) and are in demand as performers at card parties, ladies' club meetings, bazaars, and other social functions in this North Dakota village,

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where they are looked upon, with smiling benevolence, as freaks. Some of their readings, taken from poets such as Longfellow, Tennyson, Kipling and Eugene Field, are easy to memorise, because of their hobbyhorse metrics. But there are the long monologues in prose, by obscure or anonymous writers, which are harder to cope with: the lyrical one about the unhappy child whose father (so his mother has told him) is away on a business trip with the angels; the one about the "real boy", whose freedom has recently been encroached upon ("Aw, shucks, I been keeping my turtle in that old crib") by a baby sister; or the one, with the added difficulty of dialect, about the Swede who has just seen his first baseball game.

The younger brother goes at his readings professionally—getting the emphasis on the proper words, colouring significant phrases, planning pauses for breathing and for effect—until he's subdued the whole piece and has it sounding the way he wants it to sound. But the older brother, drawn and pale as he recites, gallops through both tragedy and farce with the same hurt look in his eyes, as though any verbal attempt at what he felt could only destroy the purity of his feeling.

Now he is drawing. The younger one sinks to the floor, detaching himself from his brother's concentration, and becomes aware of the fragrance of raw oak the open desk breathes into the room, so overpowering it seems to him he is leaning against the enriched air. He closes his eyes and can distinguish other smells, more delicate, more elusive, mingled with the heavy resinous smell; they seem to arrange themselves in layers, and he works at separating each one. He picks out a sweetness of glue, a bitter yellow perfume he knows his mother never uses, an acetic tang of ink, a hint of age similar to the dense, oily smell that slips from the riffled pages of an old book . . . Having almost lost his balance, he quickly opens his eyes and the sunlit room startles him. He looks up at his brother, whose lips are compressed tightly as he draws. Realising that the purpose of the picture is somewhat beyond him, and made unhappy by this, he turns away and studies the bottom drawer of the desk.

From the swirling oak grain he isolates the shape of an archway, a swallow in flight, a rising flame, an eye. When a cloud covers the sun, he notices how the dark grain moves to a greater depth, the silvery highlights shift, and the colours alter. From coppery brown, rose, bronze, and gold, he sees that the deep grain has turned to dark umber, to black. He rises and stands at his brother's side, his finger twisting the dark hair above his ear. "Why don't you use a colour crayon?" he asks.

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"Nnn?" Hardly a response, he is so absorbed.

"So I could see it."

"It wouldn't be any good then."

"How come?"

"Because then you could see it."

"Oh . . ." the younger one says, unsure whether or not to concede to this logic. He watches the way his brother moves the pen—in quick pinching motions of his fingers, while his hand and arm lie absolutely still—and finds himself, though detached from the act, participating so physically in it that a cloak of sensation covers his shoulders and then, as he moves to speak, slips down his back. "How do you *know* it's good?"

"I'm doing it."

"But you can't see what you're doing."

Distracted from his work, a veil of creation clouding his eyes, the older brother looks at the younger one. Being as patient as he knows how to be, with someone so young, not even six, he says, "Nobody can see it. It's invisible."

"That's what I mean!"

"I know." The perfect reply—ambiguous enough to stun the inquisitive one into silence. Having done so, the older brother looks at the drawing and sees that it is completed. He puts the cap on the bottle of ink eradicator, puts it into a pigeon-hole of the desk, puts the pen away, and places the blank sheet of paper on the pile from which he took it. This infuriates the younger one.

"What are you *doing*?"

"I'm finished."

"Don't put it there! Dad'll use it."

"It doesn't matter. I know what it is."

"He'll write a letter and send it away!"

"That's okay. They won't see it."

"Make it so they can see it!"

"Then he wouldn't send it to anybody."

"Make it so *I* can see it!"

"If you could see it, it wouldn't be invisible."

"*Why do you want it invisible!*"

"Because it's mine."

Two brothers. Exact opposites, they are exactly as two brothers should be; they will be necessary to each other for the rest of their lives. The one with a passionate need to know, to be told, what everything means, the other already knowing that whatever means the most is invisible. His record of that afternoon is the one you should have.

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CONCLUDING OUR EXCLUSIVE SERIALISATION OF THIS AUTUMN'S MOST EXCITING THRILLER

WHEN EIGHT BELLS TOLL

BY ALISTAIR MACLEAN

I TOOK the rifle and moved cautiously towards the edge of the cliff, the bayonet prodding the earth ahead of me as I went. I found the edge, stepped back, reversed the rifle, made two parallel scores in the sodden turf about a foot apart and eighteen inches in length, terminating on the very edge. I wiped the butt clean and placed the rifle on the ground. When the dawn came, the sentry was changed and a search made, I trusted the proper conclusions would be drawn.

I hadn't hit him as hard as I'd thought, he was beginning to stir and moan feebly by the time I got back to him. This was all to the good, the alternative would have been to carry him and I was in no fit state to carry anyone. I stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth and the moaning stopped.

He was up on his feet in two minutes. He didn't try to run away or offer resistance, for by this time he had his ankles on a short hobble, his hands tied securely behind his back and the barrel of an automatic pressing into the side of his neck. I told him to walk, and he walked. Two hundred yards away, at the head of the path leading down to the landing-stage, I led him off to one side, tied his wrists and ankles together and left him

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Harry had come to. Susan Kirkside was pointing a rifle in his general direction . . .

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there. He seemed to be breathing without too much difficulty.

There were no other sentries, at least not on the main gate. I crossed the hollow square of a courtyard and came to the main door. It was closed but not locked. The window curtains must have been drawn and the darkness inside that hall was total. I didn't much fancy moving around a Scottish baronial hall in total darkness. I took out my pencil flash but the glow-worm inside was breathing its last.

From the air, yesterday, I'd seen that the castle had been built in perfect symmetry round three sides of a hollow square. It was a reasonable assumption then that if the main door was in the middle of the central or seaward-facing section then the main staircase would be directly opposite.

The stairs were where they should have been. Ten wide shallow steps and then the stairs branched both right and left. I chose the left-hand side. Six steps on the second flight of stairs, another left turn, eight more steps and then I was on the landing.

I opened a door a fraction of an inch. There was a light on inside the room. I changed the torch for the gun, went on my knees, crouched low and abruptly opened the door wide. I stood up, closed and locked the door and crossed over to the bed.

Susan Kirkside was deep in sleep. She had a blue silk band round her hair, and all of her face was visible, a sight that must have been rare indeed during her waking hours. Twenty-one, her father had said she was, but lying there asleep, smudged eyes and all, she looked no older than seventeen. On the bedside table was a half-empty glass of water and beside that a bottle containing a commercial brand of nembutal tablets. Oblivion appeared to be a pretty hard thing to come by in Dubh Sgeir and I'd no doubt Susan Kirkside found it more difficult than most.

I picked up a towel from a basin in the corner of the room, removed the worst of the moisture and dirt from my head and face, combed my hair into some semblance of order and gave my kindly reassuring smile a try-out in the mirror.

It took almost two minutes to shake her awake. Full consciousness took another minute, and she had time to adjust herself to the slow realisation of the presence of a stranger in the middle of the night.

"Who are you? Who *are* you?" Her voice was shaking, the blue eyes, still misted with sleep, wide open and scared. "Don't you touch me! Don't you—I'll scream for help—I'll—"

I took her hands just to show her that there was touching and touching. "I won't touch you, Sue Kirkside. Don't scream. In

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The story so far: Investigating ship disappearances off the west coast of Scotland, PHILIP CALVERT, British naval intelligence agent, is shot down by the gang of hi-jackers while conducting an air search. After a miraculous escape from his helicopter, Calvert returns to his boat, *Firecrest*, a disguised marine survey vessel, to find his mate, HUNSLETT mysteriously missing. Later Calvert's London chief, an admiral known as UNCLE ARTHUR, arrives, and together they visit the nearby luxury yacht, *Shangri-la*, belonging to SIR ANTHONY SKOURAS. The surprised reception Calvert receives convinces him that Skouras and his business associates are the ringleaders of the hi-jacking gang. Back on the *Firecrest*, Calvert finds Hunslett's murdered body. At this point CHARLOTTE, Skouras' ill-treated wife, comes aboard seeking sanctuary. After another violent encounter, Calvert makes for Craigmore, where he enlists the aid of an Australian, TIM HUTCHINSON. Calvert reaches Dubh Sgeir, home of LORD KIRKSIDE and his daughter SUE. He overpowers a sentry and enters the castle . . .

fact, don't talk above a whisper. It wouldn't be very safe."

Suddenly she sat bolt upright. "You're Mr. Johnson. The man from the helicopter."

"My name is Calvert. I work for the government. I'm a friend. I think you need a friend, don't you, Susan? I'm here to end your troubles," I said. "I'm here to cadge an invitation to your wedding to the Honourable John Rollinson. Make it about the end of next month, will you? I'm due some leave, then."

"Go away from here." Her voice was low and desperate. "Go away from here or you'll ruin everything. Please, please, *please* go away. I'm begging you, I'm begging you. Go away."

I said: "It appears that they have you pretty well brainwashed. If you believe their promise, you'll believe anything in the world. They won't let you go, they daren't let you go, they'll destroy every shred and trace of evidence that might ever point a finger at them."

"They won't, they *won't*. I was with Mr. Lavorski when he promised Daddy that no-one would come to any harm. He said they were businessmen, and killing was no part of business."

"Lavorski, is it? It had to be." I looked at the earnest scared face. "He may have meant it when he said it. He wouldn't have mentioned that they've murdered four people in three days."

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"You're lying! You're making this up. Things like that—things like that don't happen any more."

"There speaks the true daughter of the old Scottish clan chieftain." I said roughly. "You're no good to me. Where's your father?"

"I don't know. Mr. Lavorski and Captain Imrie came for him at eleven tonight. Daddy didn't say where he was going. He tells me nothing." She paused and snatched her hands away. Faint red patches stained her cheeks. "What do you mean, I'm no good to you?"

"Because you're young and not very clever and you don't know too much about this world and you'll believe anything a hardened criminal will tell you. But most especially because you won't believe me. You won't believe the one person who can save you all. If it wasn't that he was jumping from the frying-pan into the fire, I'd say the Honourable Rollinson has had a lucky escape."

"What do you mean?"

"He can't marry you when he is dead," I said brutally. "And he is going to die. He's going to die because Sue Kirkside let him die. Because she was too blind to know the truth when she saw it." I turned down my collar and pulled my scarf away. "Like it?" I asked.

She didn't like it at all. The red faded from her cheeks. I could see myself in her dressing-table mirror and I didn't like it either. Quinn's handiwork was in full bloom.

"Quinn?" she whispered.

"You know him?"

"I know them all."

"And do you still think our pals are unpaid missionaries for the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge?" I sneered. "Do you know Jacques and Kramer?"

She nodded.

"I killed them both tonight."

The shock treatment worked almost too well. Her face wasn't pale now, it was ashen. She said, "I think I'm going to be sick."

"Later. We've no time for these little fol-de-rols. Did your father say when he would be back?"

"No." Her eyes were sick with revulsion. It was a long time since any woman had looked at me like that.

"Do you know what those men are doing here?"

"No."

I believed her. Her old man would know, but he wouldn't have told her. Lord Kirkside was too astute to believe that their

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uninvited guests would just up and leave them unharmed. Maybe he was just desperately gambling that if he told his daughter nothing and if he could swear she knew nothing then they would leave her be.

"It's obvious that you know your fiancé is still alive," I went on. "And your elder brother. And others. They're being held here, aren't they?"

She nodded silently. I wished she wouldn't look at me like that.

"Do you know how many?"

"A dozen. More than that."

"Do you know where they are kept? There should be any amount of handy dungeons in Dubh Sgeir Castle."

"There are cellars deep underground. I've never been allowed to go near them in the past four months."

"This is your big chance come at last. Get your clothes on and take me there."

"Go down to the cellars?" Aghast was the word for her expression. "Are you mad? Daddy tells me there are at least three men on guard duty all night long. They're armed. You *must* be mad. I'm not going!"

"I didn't think you would. You'll let your boy friend die just because you're a contemptible little coward. Lord Kirkside and the Honourable Rollinson. What a lucky father. What a fortunate fiancé."

She hit me, and I knew I had won. I said without touching my face, "Don't do that. You'll waken up the guard. Get your clothes on."

I rose, sat on the footboard of the bed and contemplated the door and higher things while she changed.

"I'm ready," she said.

We went down the stairs hand in hand. I may have been the last man in the world she would have elected to be alone with on a desert island, but she clung on pretty tightly all the same.

At the foot of the steps we turned right. I flicked on the torch every few yards but it wasn't really necessary, Susan knew every yard of the way. At the end of the hall we turned left along the eastern wing. Eight yards and we stopped at a door on the right-hand side.

"The pantry," she whispered. "The kitchen is beyond that."

I stooped and looked through the keyhole. Beyond was darkness. We passed through the doorway, then into an archway giving on to the kitchen. I flashed the tiny beam around the room. Empty.

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There were three guards, Susan had said. The outside man, for whom I had accounted. The lad who patrolled the battlements. No, she didn't know what he did, but it was a good guess that he wasn't studying astronomy or guarding against parachutists. He'd have night glasses to his eyes and he'd be watching for fishing vessels, naval craft or fishery cruisers that might happen by and interrupt honest men at their work. He wouldn't see much on a night like this. And the third man, she said, guarded the back kitchen premises, the only entrance to the castle apart from the main gate—and the unfortunates in their cellars down below.

He wasn't in the kitchen premises, so he would be in the cellars down below.

A flight of steps led from the scullery beyond the kitchen down to a stone-flagged floor. To the right of this floor I could see the loom of light. Susan raised a finger to her lips and we made our way soundlessly down to the foot of the steps. I slid a cautious eye round the corner of this passageway.

It wasn't a passageway, it was the damnedest flight of steps I'd ever come across. They were lit by two or three far-spaced and very weak electric bulbs, the walls coming together towards the foot like a pair of railway lines disappearing into the distance. Maybe fifty feet—or seventy steps—down, where the first light was, another passageway branched off to the right. There was a stool at the corner of the small stone landing there, and sitting on the stool a man. Across his knees lay a rifle. They certainly went in for the heavy artillery.

I drew back. I murmured to Susan, "Where in hell's name do those steps lead to?"

"The boathouse, of course." A surprised whisper. "Where else?"

Where else, indeed. Brilliant work, Calvert, brilliant work. You'd skirted the south side of the Dubh Sgeir in the helicopter, you'd seen the castle, you'd seen the boathouse, you'd seen nary a handhold on the sheer cliff separating them, and you'd never raised an eyebrow at the glaring obviousness of the fact that ne'er the twain did meet.

"Those are the cellars in that passage going off to the right?" She nodded. "Why so far down? It's a long walk to collect the bubbly."

"They're not really wine-cellars. They used to be used as water reservoirs."

"No other way of getting down there?"

"No. Only this way."

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"And if we take five steps down this way he shoots us full of holes with his Lee Enfield. Know who it is?"

"Harry. I don't know his other name. He's an Armenian, Daddy says. He's young—and detestable."

"He had the effrontery to make a pass at the chieftain's daughter?"

"Yes. It was horrible." She touched her lips with the back of her hand.

"I don't blame him. I'd do it myself if I didn't feel my pension creeping up on me. Call him up and make amends."

"What?"

"Tell him you're sorry. Tell him you misjudged his noble character. Tell him your father is away and this is the first chance you've had of speaking to him. Tell him anything."

"He'll never believe me," she said wildly.

"When he gets within two feet of you, he'll forget all about the reasoning why. He's a man, isn't he?"

She nodded reluctantly and I disappeared into the shadows of the nearest cellar, reversed gun in hand. She called and he came a-running his rifle at the ready. When he saw who it was, he forgot all about his rifle. Susan started to speak her lines but she might have saved her breath. I stepped forward, arm swinging, and lowered him to the ground. I tied him up and, as I'd run out of handkerchiefs, ripped away part of his shirt-front and used it as a gag. Susan giggled, a giggle with a note of hysteria.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Harry. He's what they call a snappy dresser. That's a silk shirt. You're no respecter of persons, Mr. Calvert."

The boathouse wasn't really a boathouse at all, it was a large vaulted cave formed in a cleft in a natural fault in the cliff strata. At the inner end of the cave longitudinal tunnels stretched away on either side parelleling the coastline, until they vanished beyond the reach of my torch. From the air, the boathouse in the small artificial harbour, a structure of about twenty feet by twenty, had seemed incapable of housing more than two or three fair-sized rowing boats. Inside it was big enough to berth a boat the size of the *Firecrest*, and then leave room to spare. Mooring bollards, four in number, lined the eastern side of the boathouse. There were signs of recent work where the inner end of the cave had been lengthened in the direction of the longitudinal tunnels to increase the berthing space and provide a bigger working platform, but otherwise it was as it must have been for hundreds of years. I picked up a boat-hook and tried to

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test the depth, but couldn't find bottom. Any vessel small enough to be accommodated inside could enter and leave at any state of the tide. The two big doors looked solid but not too solid. There was a small dry-land doorway on the eastern side.

The berth was empty, as I had expected to find it. Our friends were apprehensive and on piece-work rates. It wasn't difficult to guess what they were working at, the working platform was liberally stacked with the tools of their trade: an oil engine-driven air compressor with a steel reservoir with outlet valves, a manually-operated, two-cylinder double-acting air pump with two outlets, two helmets with attached corselets, flexible, non-collapsible air tubes with metal couplings, weighted boots, diving dresses, life-cum-telephone lines, lead weights and scuba equipment such as I had myself, with a stack of compressed air cylinders at the ready.

I felt neither surprise nor elation, I'd known this must exist for the past forty-eight hours although I'd become certain of the location only that night. I was faintly surprised, perhaps, to see all this equipment here, for this would surely be only the spares. But I shouldn't have been vaguely surprised. Whatever this bunch lacked, it wasn't a genius for organisation.

I didn't see that night, nor did I ever see, the cellars where the prisoners were housed. After I'd huffed and puffed three-quarters of the way up that interminable flight of steps, I turned left along the passageway where we'd first seen Harry taking his ease. After a few yards the passageway broadened out into a low damp chamber containing a table made of beer-cases, some seats of the same and, in one corner, some furniture that hadn't yet been drunk. A bottle of whisky, nearly full, stood on the table.

Beyond this chamber was a massive wooden door secured by an equally massive-looking lock with the key missing. All the celluloid in the world wouldn't open this lot but a beehive plastic explosive would do a very efficient job indeed. I made another of the many mental notes I'd made that night and went up the stairs to rejoin Susan.

Harry had come to. Susan Kirkside was pointing a rifle in his general direction and looking very apprehensive.

"These people down in the cellars," I said. "They've been there for weeks, some for months. They'll be blind as bats and weak as kittens by the time they get out."

She shook her head. "I think they'll be all right. They're taken out on the landing strip there for an hour and a half every morning under guard. They can't be seen from the sea. We're not

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allowed to watch. Or not supposed to. I've seen them often. Daddy insisted on it. And Sir Anthony."

"Well, good old Daddy." I stared at her. "Old man Skouras. He comes here?"

"Of course." She seemed surprised at my surprise. "He's one of them. Lavorski and this man Dollmann, the men that do all the arranging, they work for Sir Anthony. Didn't you know? Daddy and Sir Anthony were friends—before this."

"But they're not friends now?" I probed keenly.

"Sir Anthony has gone off his head since his first wife died," Susan said. "He married again, you know. Some French actress or other. She's no good. She caught him on the rebound."

"Susan, do you know her well?"

"I've never met her."

"You didn't have to tell me. And poor old Sir Anthony—he doesn't know what he's doing, is that it?"

"He's all mixed up," she said defensively. "He's sweet, really he is. Or was."

"All mixed up with the deaths of four men, not to mention three of his own," I said. Sergeant MacDonald thought him a good man. Susan thought him sweet. I wondered what she would say if she saw Charlotte Skouras' back.

Then I said, "My arrival in the helicopter here yesterday afternoon was duly reported by radio to the *Shangri-la*. A man with a badly scarred face. Where's the radio transmitter?"

"You know everything, don't you?"

"Know-all Calvert. Where is it?"

"Off the hall. In the room behind the stairs. It's locked."

"I have keys that'll open the Bank of England. Wait a minute." I went down to the guard's room outside the prisoners' cellar, brought the whisky bottle back up to where Susan was standing and handed it to her. "Hang on to this."

She looked at me steadily. "Do you really need this?"

"Oh my God, sweet youth," I said nastily. "Sure I need it, I'm an alcoholic."

The transceiver was a beauty, a big gleaming metallic RCA, the latest model as used in the naval vessels of a dozen nationalities. I sat down and started tuning the set, then looked up at Susan. "Go and fetch me one of your father's razor blades."

"You don't want me to hear, is that it?"

"Think what you like. Just get it."

The set covered every transmission frequency from the bottom of the long wave to the top of the VHF. It took only two

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minutes to raise SPFX. It was manned night and day the year round. It really was most considerate of the ungodly to provide me with such a magnificent instrument.

Sue Kirkside was back before I started speaking. I was ten minutes on the microphone altogether. Apart from code-names and map references I used plain English throughout. I had to, I'd no book, and time was too short anyway. I spoke slowly and clearly, giving precise instructions about the movements of men, the alignment of radio frequencies, the minutest details of the layout of Dubh Sgeir castle and asking all-important questions about recent happenings on the Riviera. I didn't repeat myself once, and I asked for nothing to be repeated to me, because every word was being recorded. I signed off, reset the tuning band to its original position and stood up. "I'm off."

"You're *what*?" The grey-blue eyes were wide, the eyebrows still up under the fringe, but with alarm, this time, not astonishment. "You're leaving? You're leaving me here?"

"I'm leaving. If you think I'd stay a minute longer in this damned castle than I have to, you must be nuts. I've played my hand far enough already. Do you think I want to be around here when the guards change over?"

"You've got a gun," she said wildly. "You could—you could capture the guards. They're on the second floor. They'll be asleep."

"How many?"

"Eight or nine. I'm not sure."

"Eight or nine, she's not sure! Stand aside, do you want me to get killed? And, Susan, tell nothing to anybody. Not even Daddy. Not if you want to see Johnny-boy walk down that aisle. You understand?"

She put a hand on my arm and said quietly but with the fear still in her face, "You could take me with you."

"I could. I could take you with me and ruin everything. Everything depends on their never knowing that anybody was here tonight. If they suspected that, they'd take off tonight. And I can't possibly do anything until tomorrow night. You understand that they wouldn't leave until after they had killed everyone in the cellar. And your father, of course. Do you want that, Susan? God knows I'd love to take you out of here, but if I take you the alarm bells will ring and then they'll pull the plug. Can't you see that? You must not be missing."

"All right." She was calm now. "But you've overlooked Harry. He'll be missing. He'll have to be. You can't leave him to talk."

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"He'll be missing. So will the keeper of the gate. I clobbered him on the way in." She started to get all wide-eyed again but I held up my hand, stripped off coat and wind-breaker, unwrapped the razor she'd bought me and nicked my forearm, not too deeply—the way I felt I needed all the blood I had—but enough to let me smear the bottom three inches of the bayonet on both sides. I handed her the tin of Elastoplast and without a word she stuck a strip across the incision. I dressed again and we left, Susan with the whisky bottle and torch, myself with the rifle, shepherding Harry in front of me. Once in the hall I relocked the door with the skeleton key I'd used to open it.

We made our way through the courtyard across to where I'd left the other bayonet lying on the cliff edge, using the torch, now with the Elastoplast removed from its face, quite freely, but keeping our voices low.

I located the bayonet and told Harry to lie face down in the grass; if I'd left him standing he just might have been tempted to kick me over the edge. I gouged the grass in assorted places with heel and toe, made a few more scores with the butt of a bayonet, stuck the blade of the gate-keeper's bayonet in the ground at a slight angle so the the rifle was just clear of the ground, laid Harry's down so that the blood-stained bayonet tip was also just clear of the ground, so preventing the blood from running off into the wet grass, scattered most of the contents of the whisky bottle around and carefully placed the bottle, about a quarter full now, close to one of the bayonets. I said to Susan, "And what happened here do you think?"

"It's obvious. They had a drunken fight and both of them slipped on the wet grass over the edge of the cliff."

"And what did you hear?"

"Oh! I heard the sound of two men shouting in the hall. I went on to the landing and I heard them shouting at the tops of their voices. I heard the one tell Harry to get back to his post and Harry saying, no, by God, he was going to settle it now. I'll say both men were drunk. The last I heard, they were crossing the courtyard together, still arguing."

"Good girl. That's exactly what you heard."

She came with us as far as the place where I'd left the gate-keeper. He was still breathing. I used most of what rope I'd left to tie them together at the waist, a few feet apart, and wrapped the end of it in my hand. With their arms lashed behind their backs they weren't going to have much balancing power and no holding power at all on the way down that steep and crumbling path to the landing stage. If either of them slipped or stumbled

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I might be able to pull them back to safety with a sharp tug.

I said, "Thank you, Susan. You have been a great help. Don't take any more of those nembutal tablets tonight. They'd think it damn' funny if you were still asleep at midday tomorrow."

"I wish it were midday the next day. I won't let you down, Mr. Calvert. Everything is going to be all right, isn't it?"

"Of course."

There was a pause, then she said, "You could have pushed these two over the edge if you'd wanted to, couldn't you? But you didn't. You could have cut Harry's arm, but you cut your own. I'm sorry for what I said, Mr. Calvert. About you being horrible and terrible. You do what you have to do." Another pause. "I think you're rather wonderful."

"They all come round in the end," I said, but I was talking to myself, she'd vanished into the mist.

With my two prisoners, I went slowly down that crumbling treacherous path, torch in my left hand, rope in my right.

"You had a pleasant outing, I trust?" Hutchinson asked courteously.

"It wasn't dull. You would have enjoyed it." I watched Hutchinson as he pushed the *Firecrest* into the fog and the darkness. "Where now?"

"Home. If you can find it in this lot."

"Craigmore? I can find it." Hutchinson puffed at his cigar and held the end close to his eyes. "I think I should put this out. It's getting so I can't even see the length of the wheelhouse windows, far less beyond them. Uncle Arthur's taking his time, interrogating the prisoners."

"I wouldn't say he'd get much out of that lot."

"Neither would I. They're not too happy."

"Well, it *was* a nasty jump from the pier to the foredeck. Especially with their arms tied behind their backs."

"One broken ankle and one broken forearm," I said. "It could have been worse. They could have missed the foredeck altogether."

"You have a point," Hutchinson agreed. He stuck his head out of the side window and withdrew it again. "Visibility is zero, and I mean zero. We're flying blind on instruments. You may as well switch on the wheelhouse lights. Makes it all that easier to read the charts, depth-sounder and compass and doesn't affect the radar worth a damn."

"Any luck, sir?" I said as Uncle Arthur came into the wheelhouse.

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"One of them passed out." Uncle Arthur wasn't looking very pleased with himself. "The other kept moaning so loudly that I couldn't make myself heard. Well, Calvert, the story."

I said "goodnight" five minutes later. Uncle Arthur wasn't too pleased, I'd the feeling he thought I'd missed out on the suspense and fancy descriptions.

I looked in on Charlotte Skouras; she was sleeping like the dead. I wondered about that chemist back in Torbay, he'd been three parts asleep, myopic as a barn owl and crowding eighty. He could have made a mistake.

But I'd done the old boy an injustice. After what was, to me, our miraculous arrival at Craigmore, it had taken me no more than a minute to shake Charlotte into something resembling wakefulness. I told her to get dressed—a cunning move this to make her think I didn't know she was still dressed—and come ashore. Fifteen minutes after that we were all inside Hutchinson's house and fifteen minutes still later, when Uncle Arthur and I had roughly splinted the prisoners' fractures and locked them up, I was in bed. I was just dropping off to sleep, when the door opened and the light came on. I blinked open exhausted eyes and saw Charlotte Skouras softly closing the door behind her.

"Go away," I said. "I'm sleeping."

"May I come in?" she asked.

"Sorry, I'm tired. What can I do? I'm not at my best receiving lady callers in the middle of the night."

"Uncle Arthur's next door. You can always scream for help if you want to." She looked at a moth-eaten armchair and sat down. She looked up with an almost timid half-smile that didn't belong to her at all.

"You are wondering why I came?" she asked.

"No. You want me to tell you the whole story. Especially the beginning and end of the story."

She nodded. "When I began as a stage actress, I played very small parts, but I knew what the play was all about. In this real-life play, I'm still playing a very small part. Only, I no longer know what the play is all about. I come on for three minutes in Act 2, but I have no idea what has gone before. I'm back for another minute in Act 4, but I've no idea in the world what's happened between Acts 2 and 4. And I cannot begin to imagine how it will all end." She half-lifted her arms, turning the palms upwards. "You cannot imagine how frustrating this can be for a woman."

"You really know nothing of what has gone before this?"

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"I ask you to believe me."

I believed her. I believed her because I knew it to be true.

"Go to the front room and bring me, as they say in these parts, a refreshment," I said. "I grow weaker by the hour."

So she rose obediently and went to the front room and brought me the refreshment which gave me just enough strength to tell her what she wanted to know.

"They were a triumvirate," I said, which if not strictly accurate, was close enough to the truth for my explanation. "Sir Anthony, Lavorski, who, I gather, was not only his public and private accountant, but his overall financial director as well, and John Dollmann, the managing director of the shipping companies associated with your husband's oil companies.

"Lavorski, I think we'll find, was the instigator and guiding brain behind all this. Lavorski it would have been who discovered that the Skouras empire was badly in need of some new lifeblood in the way of investment capital and saw the way of putting matters right by using means they already had close to hand."

"But—but my husband was never short of money," Charlotte objected. "He had the best of everything, yachts, cars, houses—"

"He was never short in that sense. Lavorski struck upon the happy idea of piracy on a grand scale—vessels carrying not less than a million pounds' worth of specie at a time."

She stared at me, her lips parted. She whispered, "You're making all this up."

"Lavorski made it all up. I'm just telling you, I wouldn't have the brains to think of something like that. Having thought up this splendid scheme for making money, they found themselves with three problems to solve: how to discover when and where large quantities of specie were being shipped, how to seize those ships and how to hide them while they opened the strongroom —a process which in ships fitted with the most modern strongrooms can take anything up to a day—and removed said specie.

"Problem number one was easy. I have no doubt Lavorski may have suborned high-ranking officials, but I don't think it will ever be possible to bring those men to justice. But it will be possible to arrest and very successfully indict their ace informant, their trump card, our very good friend the belted broker, Lord Charnley. To make a real good-going success of piracy you require the co-operation of Lloyd's. Well, that's an actionable statement—the co-operation of someone in Lloyd's. Someone

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like Lord Charnley. He is, by profession, a marine underwriter at Lloyd's.

"A large proportion of valuable marine cargoes are insured at Lloyd's. Charnley would know of at least a number of those. He would know the amount, the firm or bank of dispatch, and possibly the date of dispatch and vessel.

"Dollmann solved problem two—the hi-jacking of the specie. I shouldn't imagine this strained his resources too far. Your husband ships his oil into some very odd and very tough places indeed and it goes without saying that he employs some very odd and very tough people to do it. Dollmann wouldn't have recruited the hi-jacking crew himself, he probably singled out our good friend Captain Imrie, and gave him the authority to go through the Skouras fleets and hand-pick suitable men for the job. Once the hi-jacking crew was assembled and ready, Messrs. Skouras, Lavorski and Dollmann waited till the victim was on the high seas, dumped you and the stewardess on shore, embarked the lads on the *Shangri-la*, intercepted the specie-carrying vessel and, by one of a series of ruses, succeeded in boarding it and taking over. Then the *Shangri-la* landed the captured crew under guard while the prize crew sailed the hi-jacked vessel to the appointed hiding place."

"It can't be true, it can't be true," she murmured. "Hiding place, Philip? What hiding place?"

"There are millions of places. You can hide a ship practically anywhere in the world. All you have to do is to open the sea-cocks and send it to the bottom. The west side of the sound to the east of Dubh Sgeir island, a cheery stretch of water rejoicing in the name of Beul nan Uamh—the mouth of the grave—must be the most densely packed marine graveyard in Europe today. At dead slack water the sea-cocks were opened at a very carefully selected spot in the Beul nan Uamh and down they went, all five of them, gurgle, gurgle, gurgle. Tide tables show that, coincidentally, most of them were sunk at or near midnight."

"Dubh Sgeir? But—but that's the home of Lord Kirkside."

"It's not 'but', it's 'because'. The hiding place was picked either by your husband, or, if someone else, then the arrangement was made through your husband. I never knew until recently that your husband was an old drinking pal of Lord Kirkside. I saw him yesterday, but he wouldn't talk. Nor would his charming daughter."

"You do move around. I've never met the daughter."

"You should. She thinks you're an old gold-digging hag. A nice kid really. But terrified for her life and those of others."

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"Why on earth should she be?"

"How do you think our triumvirate got Lord Kirkside to agree to their goings-on?"

"Money. Bribery."

I shook my head. "Lord Kirkside is a Highlander and a gentleman. It's a pretty fierce combination. Old Skouras could never lay hands on enough money to bribe Lord Kirkside. The old boy is incorruptible. So your charming friends kidnapped old Kirkside's elder son—the younger lives in Australia—and just to make sure that Susan Kirkside wouldn't be tempted to do anything silly, they kidnapped her fiancé. A guess, but a damned good one. They're supposed to be dead."

"No, no," she whispered. Her hand was to her mouth and her voice was shaking. "My God, no!"

"My God, yes. It's logical and tremendously effective. They also kidnapped Sergeant MacDonald's sons to buy silence and co-operation."

"But—but people just can't disappear like that."

"We're not dealing with street corner boys, we're dealing with criminal master-minds. Disappearances are rigged to look like accidental deaths. A few other people have disappeared also, people who had the misfortune to be hanging around in small private boats while our friends were waiting for the tide to be exactly right before opening the sea-cocks on the hi-jacked ships."

"It must be true, I know it must be true." She shook her head as if she didn't believe it was true at all. "It all fits so well, it explains so many things and explains them perfectly. But—but what's the good of knowing all this now? They're on to you, they *know* you know that something is far wrong and that that something is in Loch Houron. They'll leave—"

"How do they know we suspect Loch Houron?"

"Uncle Arthur told me in the wheelhouse last night." Surprise in her voice. "Don't you remember?"

I hadn't remembered. I did now. I was half-dead from lack of sleep. A stupid remark. Perhaps even a give-away remark. I was glad Uncle Arthur hadn't heard that one.

"Calvert nears the sunset of his days," I said. "My mind's going. Sure they'll leave. But not for forty-eight hours yet. They will think they have plenty of times, it's less than eight hours since we instructed Sergeant MacDonald to tell them that we were going to the mainland for help."

"I see," she said dully. "And what did you do on Dubh Sgeir tonight, Philip?"

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"Not much. But enough." Another little white lie. "Enough to confirm my every last suspicion. I swam ashore to the little harbour and picked the side door of the boathouse. Not only is it three times as big inside as it is from the outside, but it's stacked with diving equipment."

"Diving equipment?"

"Heaven help us all, you're almost as stupid as I am. How on earth do you think they recover the stuff from the sunken vessels? They use a diving-boat and the Dubh Sgeir boathouse is its home."

"Dear God," she murmured. "What a mess, what a terrible mess. And you've no radio, we're cut off from all help. What *are* you going to do, Philip?"

"I'm going there in the *Firecrest* this coming night. I have a machine-gun under the settee of the saloon in the *Firecrest* and Uncle Arthur and Tim Hutchinson will have a gun apiece. We'll reconnoitre. The boat-house doors are ill-fitting and if there's no light showing that will mean they still haven't finished their diving. So we wait till they have finished and come in. We'll see the light two miles away when they open the door to let the diving-boat in to load up all the stuff they've cached from the four other sunken ships. The front doors of the boathouse will be closed, of course, while they load up. So we go in through the front doors. On the deck of the *Firecrest*. The doors don't look all that strong to me. Surprise is everything. We'll catch them napping. A sub-machine-gun in a small enclosed space is a deadly weapon."

"You'll be killed, you'll be killed!" She crossed to and sat on the bedside, her eyes wide and scared. "Please, Philip! Please, *please* don't."

"I have to, Charlotte. Time's run out. There's no other way."

"Please." The brown eyes were full of unshed tears. This I couldn't believe. "Please, Philip. For my sake."

"No." A tear-drop fell at the corner of my mouth, it tasted as salt as the sea. "Anything else in the world. But not this."

She rose slowly to her feet and stood there. She said dully, "It's the maddest plan I've ever heard in my life," turned and left the room, switching off the light as she went.

I lay there staring into the darkness. There was sense in what the lady said. It *was*, I thought, the maddest plan *I'd* ever heard in my life. I was damned glad I didn't have to use it . . .

"Let me sleep." I said. I kept my eyes shut. "I'm a dead man."

"Come on, come on." Another violent shake, a hand like a power shovel. "Up!"

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"Oh, God!" I opened the corner of one eye. "What's the time?"

"Just after noon. I couldn't let you sleep any more."

"Noon! I asked to be shaken at five. Do you know—"

"Come here." He moved to the window, and I swung my legs stiffly out of bed and followed him. Hutchinson nodded towards the window. "What do you think of that?"

I peered out into the grey opaque world. I said irritably: "What do you expect me to see in that damn' fog?"

"The fog."

"I see," I said stupidly. "The fog."

"The two a.m. shipping forecast," Hutchinson said. "It said the fog would clear away in the early morning. Well, the god-damned fog hasn't cleared away."

The fog cleared away from my befuddled brain. I swore and jumped for my least sodden suit of clothing. It was damp and clammy and cold but I hardly noticed these things, except sub-consciously, my conscious mind was frantically busy with some-thing else. On Monday night they'd sunk the *Nantesville* at slack water but there wasn't a chance in a thousand that they would have been able to get something done that night or the Tuesday night, the weather had been bad enough in sheltered Torbay harbour, God alone knew what it would have been like in Beul nan Uamh. But they could have started last night, they *had* started last night for there had been no diving-boat in the Dubh Sgeir boathouse, and reports from the *Nantesville*'s owners had indicated that the strongroom was a fairly antiquated one, not of hardened steel, that could be cut open in a couple of hours with the proper equipment. Lavorski and company would have the proper equipment. The rest of last night, even had they three divers and reliefs working all the time, they could have brought up a fair proportion of the bullion but I'd been damn' sure they couldn't possibly bring up all eighteen tons of it. Marine salvage had been my business before Uncle Arthur had taken me away. They would have required another night or at least a good part of the night, because they only dared work when the sun was down. When no-one could see them. But no-one could see them in dense fog like this. This was as good as another night thrown in for free.

"Give Uncle Arthur a shake. Tell him we're on our way. In the *Firecrest*."

"He'll want to come."

"He'll have to stay. He'll know damn' well he'll have to stay. Beul nan Uamh, tell him."

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"Not Dubh Sgeir? Not the boathouse?"

"*You* know damn' well we can't move in against that until midnight."

"I'd forgotten," Hutchinson said slowly. "We can't move in against it until midnight."

The Beul nan Uamh wasn't living up to its fearsome reputation. At that time in the afternoon it was dead slack water and there was only the gentlest of swells running up from the southwest. We crossed over from Ballara to the extreme north of the eastern shore of Dubh Sgeir and inched our way southward with bare steerage way on. We'd cut the by-pass valve into the underwater exhaust and, even in the wheelhouse, we could barely hear the throb of the diesel. Even with both wheelhouse doors open wide, we could just hear it and no more.

By this time we were almost half-way down the eastern patch of miraculously calm water that bordered the normal mill-race of Beul nan Uamh, the one that I had observed from the helicopter the previous afternoon. For the first time, Hutchinson was showing something approaching worry.

"Are you sure it'll be this fourteen-fathom ledge, Calvert?"

"It has to be. It damn' well has to be. Out to the seven fathom mark there the sea-bottom is pretty flat, but there's not enough depth to hide superstructure and masts at low tide. From there to fourteen it's practically a cliff. And beyond the fourteen fathom ledge it goes down to thirty-five fathom, steep enough to roll a ship down there. You can't operate at those depths without very special equipment indeed."

"It's a damn' narrow ledge," he grumbled. "Less than a cable. How could they be sure the scuttled ship would fetch up where they wanted it to?"

"They could be sure. In dead slack water, you can always be sure."

Hutchinson put the engine in neutral and went outside. We drifted on quietly through the fog. Visibility didn't extend beyond our bows. The muffled beat of the diesel served only to enhance the quality of ghostly silence. Hutchinson came back into the wheelhouse, his vast bulk moving as unhurriedly as always.

"I'm afraid you're right. I hear an engine."

I listened, then I could hear it too, the unmistakable thudding of an air compressor.

I said, "What do you mean afraid?"

"You know damn' well." He touched the throttle, gave the wheel a quarter turn to port and we began to move out gently.

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"Do you *think* I'm a nut case? Do you think I *want* to go down? I bloody well don't want to go down—and you bloody well know that I *have* to go down. And you know why. You want them to finish up here, load up in Dubh Sgeir and the whole lot to be to hell and gone before midnight?"

"Half. Take half of our share. God, man, we do nothing."

"I'll settle for a pint in the Columba Hotel in Torbay. You just concentrate on putting this tub exactly where she ought to be. I don't want to spend the rest of my life swimming about the Atlantic when I come back up from the *Nantesville*."

He looked at me, the expression in his eyes saying "if", not "when", but kept quiet. He circled round to the south of the diving-boat—we could faintly hear the compressor all the way—then slightly to the west. He turned the *Firecrest* towards the source of the sound, manœuvring with delicacy and precision. He said, "About a cable length."

"About that. Hard to judge in fog."

"North twenty-two east true. Let go the anchor."

I let go the anchor on the end of forty fathoms of rope. It disappeared silently over the side and the Terylene as silently slid down after it. I let out all forty fathoms and made fast. I went back to the wheelhouse and strapped on the cylinders.

"You won't forget, now," Hutchinson said. "When you come up, just let yourself drift. The ebb's just setting in from the nor'-nor'-east and will carry you back here. I'll keep the diesel ticking, you'll be able to hear the underwater exhaust twenty yards away. I hope to hell the mist doesn't clear. You'll just have to swim for Dubh Sgeir."

"What happens to you if it clears?"

"I'll cut the anchor rope and take off."

"And if they come after you?"

"Come after me? Just like that? And leave two or three dead divers down inside the *Nantesville*?"

"I wish to God," I said irritably, "that you wouldn't talk about dead divers inside the *Nantesville*."

There were three divers aboard the *Nantesville*, not dead but all working furiously.

Getting down there had been no trouble. I'd swum on the surface towards the diving-boat, the compressor giving me a clear bearing all the time, and dived when only three yards away. My hands touched cables, life-lines and finally an unmistakable wire hawser. The wire hawser was the one for me.

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I stopped my descent on the wire when I saw the dim glow of light beneath me. I swam some distance to one side then down until my feet touched something solid. The deck of the *Nantesville*. I moved cautiously towards the source of the light.

There were two of them, standing in their weighted boots at the edge of an open hatchway. They were wearing not my self-contained apparatus, but regular helmet and corselet diving gear, with air-lines and life-lines, the life-lines almost certainly with telephone wires imbedded inside them.

The wire rope I'd used to guide me down to the *Nantesville*, terminated in a metal ring from which splayed out four chains to the corners of a rectangular steel mesh basket. The two divers were loading this basket with wire- and wood-handled steel boxes that they were hauling up from the hold at the rate of about one every two minutes. The steel boxes were small but obviously heavy: each held four 28-lb. ingots of gold. Each box held a fortune. There were a hundred and sixty such fortunes aboard the *Nantesville*.

I tried to calculate the overall rate of unloading. The steel basket held eight boxes. Sixteen minutes to load. Another ten minutes to winch up to the diving-boat, unload and lower again. Say twenty an hour. In a ninety-minute stretch, about thirty. But after ninety minutes they would have to change divers. Forty minutes, including two decompression stops of, say, twelve and twenty-four minutes, to get to the surface, then twenty minutes to change over and get other divers down. An hour at least. So, in effect, they were clearing thirty boxes every two and a half hours, or twelve an hour. The only remaining question was, how many boxes were left in the *Nantesville*'s strongroom?

I had to find out and I had to find out at once. I'd had only the two compressed air-cylinders aboard the *Firecrest* and already their two hundred atmospheres were seriously depleted. The wire hawser jerked and the full basket started to rise, the divers guiding it clear of the superstructure with a trailing guide rope. I moved forward from the corner of the partially opened hatch remote from where they were standing and cautiously wriggled over and down. With excessive caution, I supposed: their lamp cast only a small pool of light and they couldn't possibly have seen me from where I was standing.

I felt my hands—already puffed and numbed by the icy water—touch a life-line and air-line and quickly withdrew them. Below and to my right I could see another faint pool of light. A few cautious strokes and I could see the source of the light.

The light was moving. It was moving because it was attached

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to the helmet of a diver, angled so as to point down at an angle of forty-five degrees. The diver was inside the strongroom.

They hadn't opened that strongroom with any Yale key. They'd opened it with underwater torches cutting out a roughly rectangular section in its side, maybe six feet by four.

I moved up to this opening and pushed my head round the side. Beyond the now stooping diver was another light suspended from the deckhead. The bullion boxes were neatly stacked in racks round the side and it was a five-second job to estimate their number. Of the hundred and sixty bullion boxes, there were about sixty left.

Something brushed my arm, pulled past my arm. I glanced down and saw that it was a rope, a nylon line, that the diver was pulling in to attach to the handle of one of the boxes. I moved my arm quickly out of the way.

His back was towards me. He was having difficulty in fastening the rope but finally secured it with two half hitches, straightened and pulled a knife from his waist sheath. I wondered what the knife was for.

I found out what the knife was for. The knife was for me. Stooped over as he had been, he could just possibly have caught a glimpse of me from the corner of his eye: or he might have felt the sudden pressure, then release of pressure, on the nylon rope: or his sixth sense was in better working condition than mine. He moved too quickly for me. It wasn't my body that was slowing down as much as my mind. He was completely round and facing me, not four feet away, and I was still where I'd been when he'd first moved. The six-inch-bladed knife was held in his lowered hand with thumb and forefinger towards me, and I could see his face clearly. God knows what he wanted the knife for, it must have been a reflex action, he didn't require a knife to deal with me, he wouldn't have required a knife to deal with two of me.

It was Quinn.

I watched his face with a strangely paralysed intentness. I watched his face to see if the head would jerk down to press the telephone call-up buzzer with his chin. But his head didn't move, Quinn had never required any help in his life and he didn't require any now. He had the face of a man in the moment of supreme religious ecstasy. He fell slowly forwards, his knees bending, till he was at an angle of almost forty-five degrees and launched himself forward, his right arm already swinging far behind his back.

The moment of thrall ended. I thrust off backwards from the

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strongroom's outer wall with my left foot, saw the air-hose come looping down towards me as Quinn came through the jagged hole, caught it and jerked down with all my strength to pull him off-balance. A sharp stinging pain burned its way upwards from my lower ribs to my right shoulder. I felt a sudden jerk in my right hand. I fell backwards on to the floor of the hold and then I couldn't see Quinn any more, not because the fall had dazed me nor because Quinn had moved, but because he had vanished in the heart of an opaque, boiling, mushrooming cloud of dense air-bubbles. A non-collapsible air-hose can, and often has to, stand up to some pretty savage treatment, but it can't stand up to the wickedly slicing power of a razor-sharp knife in the hands of the strongest man I'd ever known. Quinn had cut his own air-hose, had slashed it cleanly in two.

No power on earth could save Quinn now. With a pressure of forty pounds to the square inch on that severed air-line, he would be drowning already, his suit filling up with water and weighting him down so that he could never rise again. Almost without realising what I was doing I advanced with the nylon rope still in my hands and coiled it any old way round the madly threshing legs, taking great care indeed to keep clear of those flailing arms, for Quinn could still have taken me with him, could have snapped my neck like a rotten stick. At the back of my mind I had the vague hope that when his comrades investigated, they would think he'd become entangled and tried to cut himself free. I did not think it a callous action then nor do I now. I had no qualms about doing this to a dying man, and no compunction: he was doomed anyway, he was a psychopathic monster who killed for the love of it and, most of all, I had to think of the living who might die, the prisoners in the cellars of the Dubh Sgeir castle. I left him threshing there, dying there, and swam up and hid under the deck-head of the hold.

The two men who had been on deck were already on their way down, being slowly lowered on their life-lines. As soon as their air helmets sunk below my level I came up through the hatchway, located the wire hawser and made my way up. I'd been down for just under ten minutes, so when my wrist depth-gauge showed a depth of two fathoms I stopped for a three-minute decompression period. By now, Quinn would be dead.

I did as Hutchinson had told me, drifted my way back to the *Firecrest* and located it without difficulty. Hutchinson was there to help me out of the water and I was glad of his help.

"Am I glad to see you, brother," he said. "How did it go?"

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"All right. We've time. Five or six hours yet."

"I'll get the hook up." Three minutes later we were on our way and three minutes after that we were out near enough in the mid-channel of the Beul nan Uamh, heading north-north-east against the gathering ebb. I could hear the helm going on auto-pilot and then Hutchinson came through the door into the lit saloon, where I was rendering some first aid to myself, just beginning to tape up a patch of gauze over the gash that stretched from lowest rib to shoulder. He said, "What happened, Calvert?"

"Quinn. I met him in the strongroom of the *Nantesville*. He cut his own air-hose." I told him what had happened and he said nothing. He didn't exchange a dozen words all the way back to Craigmore. I knew he didn't believe me. I knew he never would.

Hours later at the cottage on Craigmore, just before our eleven p.m. deadline for taking off, I was talking to Charlotte.

"I'm sorry, Charlotte, but it's not on," I said. "You are not coming with us, and that's that. We're not going picnicking on the Thames. Remember what you said yourself this morning. There will be shooting. Do you think I want to see you killed?"

"I mean so much to you?"

I nodded. She looked at me for a long time, her eyes wide and questioning, her lips moving as if about to speak and yet not speaking, then took a step forward, latched her arms around my neck and tried to break it. At least, that was the way it felt, the dead Quinn's handiwork was still with me, but it wasn't that at all, she was clinging to me as she might cling to a person whom she knew she would never see again. I was beginning to have some difficulty with my breathing when she suddenly let me go, half-led, half-pushed me from the room and closed the door.

"Our friends are at home," Tim Hutchinson said. We'd circled far to the south of Dubh Sgeir, close in to the southern shore of Loch Houron and were now drifting quickly on the flood tide, engines stopped, in an east-by-northerly direction past the little man-made harbour of Dubh Sgeir. "You were right, Calvert. They're getting all ready for their moonlit flitting."

The mist had thinned now, giving maybe a hundred yards' visibility. I looked at the T-shaped crack of light showing where the boathouse doors didn't quite meet each other and where the tops of the doors sagged away from the main structure.

"How's the time?" I said. I turned to Hutchinson. "You really think it can be done—taking her through that entrance fast enough to smash open those doors without piling ourselves up on the rocks on the way?"

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"There's only one way to find out." He pushed the throttle wide open and prepared for action.

For just over a minute there was nothing to be seen, just the darkness and patches of grey mist swirling past our bows. Hutchinson was heading a few degrees west of north, making allowance for the set of the tide. All at once we could see it, that big T-shaped light in the darkness, fairly jumping at us. I picked up the sub-machine-gun, opened and latched back the port wheelhouse door and stood there, gun in left hand, door-jamb in right, with one foot on the outside deck and the other still in the wheelhouse. Uncle Arthur, I knew, was similarly positioned on the starboard side. We were as firmly braced as it was possible to be. When the *Firecrest* stopped, it would stop very suddenly.

Forty yards away, Hutchinson eased the throttle and gave the wheel a touch to port. That bright T was even farther round on out starboard side now, but directly in line with us and the patch of dark water to the west of the almost phosphorescently foaming whiteness that marked the point where the flood tide ripped past the outer end of the eastern breakwater. Twenty yards away he pushed the throttle open again; we were heading straight for where the unseen west breakwater must be, we were far too far over to port. It was impossible now that we could avoid smashing bow first into it; then suddenly Hutchinson had the wheel spinning to starboard, the tide pushing him the same way, and we were through.

As an entrance it erred, if anything, on the spectacular side. The doors, instead of bursting open at their central hasps, broke off at the hinges and we carried the whole lot before us with a thunderous crash. This took a good knot off our speed. The aluminium foremast, with Uncle Arthur's fancy telescopic aerial inside, almost tore the tabernacle clear of the deck before it sheared off, just above wheelhouse level, with a most unpleasant metallic shrieking. That took another knot off. The screw, biting deep in maximum revs astern, took off yet another knot, but we still had a fair way on when, amid a crackling, splintering of wood, we stopped short with a jarring shock, firmly wedged between the port quarter of the diving-boat and the port wall of the boathouse. Hutchinson moved the throttle to slow ahead to keep us wedged in position and switched on the five-inch searchlight to dazzle bystanders ashore. I stepped out on the deck with the machine-pistol in my hands.

We were confronted with what had been a scene of bustling activity. Our entrance had apparently paralysed them all in whatever positions they had been at the time. On the extreme

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right three faces stared at us over the edge of the hold of the diving-boat. Two men on deck were frozen in the act of lifting a box across to the hold. Another two were standing upright, one with his hands stretched above his head, waiting for another box swinging gently from a rope suspended from a loading boom. That box was the only moving thing in the boathouse. The winchman himself, who bore an uncommon resemblance to Thomas, the bogus customs officer, one lever against his chest and another held in his outstretched right hand, looked frozen. Two others, backs bent, were standing on the wall at the head of the boathouse, holding a rope attached to a very large box which two frogmen were helping to lift clear of the water. When it came to hiding specie, they had one-track minds. On the extreme left stood Captain Imrie, presumably there to supervise operations, and, beside him, his patrons, Lavorski and Dollmann.

Imrie, Lavorski and Dollmann were the ones for me. I moved forward until I could see the barrel of the machine-gun and until they could also see that it was pointing at them.

"Come close," I said. "Yes, you three. Captain Imrie, speak to your men. Tell them that if they move, if they try anything at all, I'll kill all three of you. Do you believe me, Captain Imrie?"

"I believe you." The guttural voice was deep and sombre.

"You will come aboard our boat one at a time," I said. "In this situation, Captain Imrie, you are without question the most dangerous man. After you, Lavorski, then—"

"Please keep very still. Terribly still." The voice behind me was totally lacking in inflection, but the gun pressed hard against my spine carried its own message, one not easily misunderstood. "Good. Take a pace forward and take your right hand away from the gun."

I took a pace forward and removed my right hand. This left me holding the machine-pistol by the barrel.

"Lay the gun on the deck."

It obviously wasn't going to be much use to me as a club, so I laid it on the deck. I'd been caught like this before, once or twice, and just to show that I was a true professional I raised my hands high and turned slowly round.

"Why, Charlotte Skouras!" I said. "And how in God's name did you get here?"

"I escaped through the bedroom window of the cottage and swam out to the *Firecrest*. I hid in the after cabin." She said to Hutchinson, "Turn off that searchlight."

"Do as the lady says," I advised.

He did as the lady said. The light went out and we were all

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now in full view of the men ashore. Imrie said: "Throw that gun over the side, Admiral."

"Do as the gentleman says," I advised.

Uncle Arthur threw the gun over the side. Captain Imrie and Lavorski came walking confidently towards us. They could afford to walk confidently, the three men in the hold, the two men who had suddenly appeared from behind the diving-boat's wheelhouse and the winch-driver—a nice round total of six—had suddenly sprouted guns. I looked over this show of armed strength and said slowly, "You were waiting for us."

"Certainly we were waiting for you," Lavorski said jovially. "Our dear Charlotte announced the exact time of your arrival. Haven't you guessed that yet, Calvert?"

"How do you know my name?"

"Charlotte, you fool. By heavens, I believe we have been grievously guilty of over-estimating you."

"Mrs. Skouras was a plant," I said.

"A bait," Lavorski said cheerfully. "Swallowed hook, line, and sinker. A bait with a highly effective if tiny transmitter and a gun in a polythene bag. We found the transmitter in your starboard engine. We've known of every move you've made since you left Torbay. And how do you like that, Mr. Secret Agent Calvert?"

"I don't like it at all. What are you going to do with us?"

"Don't be childish. What are you going to do with us, asks he naïvely. I'm afraid you know all too well."

I turned to Charlotte Skouras. The gun was still pointing at me. I said, "I have to be killed, it seems. As you will be responsible for my death, you might as well finish the job." I reached down, caught the hand with the gun in it and placed it against my chest, letting my own hand fall away. "Please do it quickly."

"Are you mad?" said Uncle Arthur. "She'll kill you!"

The brown eyes were stricken, there was no other expression for it, the eyes of one who knows her world is coming to an end. The finger came off the trigger, the hand opened slowly and the gun fell to the deck with a clatter that seemed to echo through the boatshed and the tunnels leading off on either side. I took her left arm and said, "It seems Mrs. Skouras doesn't feel quite up to it. I'm afraid you'll have to find someone else to—"

Charlotte Skouras cried out in sharp pain as her legs caught the wheelhouse sill and maybe I did shove her through that doorway with unnecessary force, but it was too late in the day to take chances now. Hutchinson had been waiting and caught her as she fell, dropping to his knees at the same time. I went through

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that door and as I did, my hand reached out for the loud-hailer that had been placed in position on the wheelhouse deck.

"Don't fire!" The amplified voice boomed cavernously against the rock-faces and the wooden walls of the boatshed. "If you shoot, you'll die! One shot, and you may all die. There's a machine-gun lined up on the back of every man in this boat-house. Just turn round, very very slowly, and see for yourselves."

I half rose to my feet, hoisted a wary eye over the lower edge of a wheelhouse window, got the rest of the way to my feet, went outside and picked up the machine-gun on the deck.

Picking up that machine-gun was the most superfluous and unnecessary action I had performed for many a long day. If there was one thing that boathouse was suffering from at the moment it was a plethora of machine-guns. There were twelve of them in all, shoulder-slung machine-pistols, in twelve of the most remarkably steady pairs of hands I'd ever seen. The twelve men were ranged in a rough semicircle round the inner end of the boathouse, big, quiet, purposeful-looking men dressed in woollen caps, grey-and-black camouflaged smocks and trousers and rubber boots. Their hands and faces were the colour of coal.

"Lower your hands to your sides and let your guns fall." The order came from a figure in the middle of the group, a man indistinguishable from the others. "Do please be very careful. My men are very highly trained commandos. They have been trained to shoot on suspicion. They know only how to kill. Now clasp your hands behind your necks."

"Mr. Calvert?" the officer asked.

"Me," I said.

"Captain Rawley, sir. Royal Marine Commandos."

"The castle, Captain?"

"In our hands."

"The *Shangri-la*?"

"In our hands."

"The prisoners?"

"Two men are on their way up, sir."

I said to Imrie, "How many guards?"

Imrie said, "Two."

I said to Rawley: "Two men enough?"

"I hope, sir, that the guards will not be so foolish as to resist."

Even as he finished speaking the flat rapid-fire chatter of a sub-machine-gun came echoing down the long flight of stone steps. Rawley shrugged.

"They'll never learn to be wise now. Robinson?" This to a man with a waterproof bag over his shoulder. "Go up and open

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the cellar door. Sergeant Evans, line them up in two rows against the wall there, one standing, one sitting."

Sergeant Evans did. Now that there was no danger of being caught in cross-fire we landed and I introduced Uncle Arthur to Captain Rawley.

"Capitally done, my boy!" he said to Rawley. "Capitally. There'll be a little something for you in this New Year's List. Ah! Here come some friends."

They weren't all exactly friends, this group that appeared at the bottom of the steps. There were four tough but dispirited looking characters whom I'd never seen before, but unquestionably Imrie's men, closely followed by Sir Anthony Skouras and Lord Charnley. They, in their turn, were closely followed by four commandos. Behind them came Lord Kirkside and his daughter.

"My dear Kirkside!" Uncle Arthur hurried forward and shook him by the hand, I'd quite forgotten that they knew one another. "Delighted to see you safe and sound, my dear chap. It's all over now."

"What in God's name is happening?" Lord Kirkside asked. "You—you've got them? You have them all? Where is my boy? Where is Rollinson? What—?"

An explosive crack, curiously muffled, came down the flight of steps. Uncle Arthur looked at Rawley, who nodded. "Plastic explosive, sir."

"Excellent, excellent," Uncle Arthur beamed. "You'll see them any minute, Kirkside." He crossed over to where old Skouras was lined up against the wall, hands clasped behind his neck, reached up both his own, pulled Skouras' arms down and shook his right hand as if he were attempting to tear it off.

"You're lined up with the wrong team, Tony, my boy." This was one of the great moments of Uncle Arthur's life. He led him across to where Lord Kirkside was standing. "It's been a frightful nightmare, my boy, a frightful nightmare. But it's all over."

"Why did you do it?" Skouras said dully. "God, oh God, you don't know what you've done."

"Mrs. Skouras? The *real* Mrs. Skouras?" Uncle Arthur pushed back his sleeve and studied his watch carefully. "She arrived in London by air from Nice just over three hours ago. First plane to Renfrew and, yes, yes, she'll be in Torbay by noon."

"You don't know what you are saying. My wife—"

"Your wife is in London. Charlotte here is Charlotte Meiner and always was." I looked at Charlotte. A total incomprehension and the tentative beginnings of a dazed hope. "Earlier this year, blazing the trail for many kidnappings that were to follow, your

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friends Lavorski and Dollmann had your wife seized and hidden away to force you to act with them, to put your resources at their disposal. However, your wife managed to escape, so they seized her cousin and best friend, Charlotte, and threatened to kill her unless they got Mrs. Skouras back again. Mrs. Skouras surrendered immediately. This gave them the bright idea of having two swords of Damocles hanging over your head, so they decided to keep Charlotte as well as your imprisoned wife. Then, they knew, you would do exactly as they wanted, when and as they wanted. To have a good excuse to keep both you and Charlotte under their surveillance at the same time, and to reinforce the idea that your wife was well and truly dead, they gave out that you had been secretly married." Uncle Arthur was a kind man: no mention of the fact that it was common knowledge that, at the time of her alleged death, brain injuries sustained by Mrs. Skouras in a car crash two years previously had become steadily worse.

"How on earth did you guess that?" Lord Kirkside asked.

"No guess. Must give my lieutenants their due," Uncle Arthur said. "Hunslett radioed me at midnight on Tuesday. He gave me a list of names of people about whom Calvert wanted immediate and exhaustive inquiries made. That call was tapped

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by the *Shangri-la* but they didn't know what Hunslett was talking about because in our radio transmissions all proper names are invariably coded. Calvert told me later that when he'd seen Sir Anthony on Tuesday night he thought Sir Anthony was putting on a bit of an act. He said it wasn't all act. He said Sir Anthony was completely broken and desolated by the thought of his dead wife. He said he believed the original Mrs. Skouras was still alive, that it was totally inconceivable that a man who so patently cherished the memory of his wife should have married again two or three months later, that he could only have pretended to marry again for the sake of the one person whom he ever and so obviously loved.

"I radioed France. Riviera police dug up her grave in Beaulieu. They found a coffin full of logs. It took them half an hour to find out who had signed the death certificate and most of the rest of the day to find the doctor himself. They charged him with murder. This can be done in France on the basis of a missing body. The doctor wasted no time at all in taking them to his own private nursing home, where Mrs. Skouras was in a locked room. Why in God's name didn't you come to us before?"

"They had Charlotte and they said they would kill my wife out of hand. What—what would you have done?"

"God knows," Uncle Arthur said frankly. "She's in fair health, Tony. Calvert got radio confirmation at five a.m." Uncle Arthur jerked a thumb upwards. "On the big transceiver in the castle."

Both Skouras and Lord Kirkside had their mouths open.

"It's true," Susan Kirkside said. "I was with him. He told me to tell nobody." She crossed to take my arm and smiled up at me. "I think you're the most wonderful man I've ever known. Except Rolly, of course." She turned round at the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs and promptly forgot all about the second most wonderful man she'd ever known.

"Rolly!" she cried. "Rolly!" I could see him bracing himself.

They were all there, I counted them, Kirkside's son, the Hon. Rollinson, the policeman's sons and the missing members of the small boats.

Charlotte Skouras came and held my arm for everyone to see. I didn't mind. She said, "You were on to me? You were on to me all the time?"

"He was," Uncle Arthur said thoughtfully. "He just said he knew. You never quite got round to explaining that bit, Calvert."

"It wasn't difficult, sir—if you knew all the facts, that is," I added hastily. "Sir Anthony put me on to you, Charlotte. That visit he paid me on the *Firecrest* to allay any suspicion we might

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have had about our smashed radio set only served, I'm afraid, to make me suspicious." I turned to Sir Anthony. "You wouldn't have normally come to me, you'd have gone ashore immediately to the police or to a phone, sir. Then, in order to get me talking about the cut telephone wires, you wondered if the radio-wrecker, to complete our isolation from the mainland, had smashed the two public call boxes. From a man of your intelligence, such a suggestion was fatuous, there must be scores of houses in Torbay with their private phone. But you thought it might sound suspicious if you suggested cut lines, so you didn't. Then Sergeant MacDonald gave me a glowing report about you, said you were the most respected man in Torbay and your public reputation contrasted so sharply with your private behaviour in the *Shangri-la* on Tuesday night—well, I just couldn't buy it.

"That nineteenth-century late Victorian melodrama act that you and Charlotte put on in the saloon that night had me fooled for all of five seconds. It was inconceivable that any man so devoted to his wife could be vicious towards another obviously nice woman—"

"Thank you kindly, sir," Charlotte murmured.

"It was inconceivable that Sir Anthony would send her for his wife's photograph, unless he had been ordered to do so. And he had been ordered to do so, by Lavorski and Dollmann. And it was inconceivable that she would have gone—the Charlotte Meiner I knew would have clobbered him over the head with a marline spike. *Ergo*, if he weren't what he appeared to be, neither were you, Charlotte.

"The villains, they thought, were laying a foundation for an excellent reason for your flight from the wicked baron to the *Firecrest*, where you could become their eyes and ears and keep them informed of all our plans and moves, because they'd no idea how long their secret little transmitter in the engine-room would remain undetected. After they knew we'd found Hunslett —they'd removed the transmitter by that time—it was inevitable that they would try to get you aboard the *Firecrest*. So they laid a little more groundwork by giving you a bruised eye—the dye is nearly off already—and some wicked weals across your back and dumped you into the water with your little polythene kitbag with the micro-transmitter and gun inside it. Do this, they said, or Mrs. Skouras will get it."

She nodded. "They said that."

"I have twenty-twenty eyesight. I had a close look at those weals on your back. Genuine weals. Also genuine pin-pricks where the hypodermic with the anæsthetic had been inserted

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before the lashes were inflicted. To that degree, at least, someone was humane."

"I could stand most things," Skouras said heavily. "I couldn't stand the thought of—the thought of—"

"I guessed you had insisted on the anæsthetic, sir. No, I knew. The same way that I knew that you had insisted that the crews of all those small yachts be kept alive or the hell with the consequences. Charlotte, I ran a finger-nail down one of those weals. You should have jumped through the roof. You never batted an eyelid. After submersion in salt water. After that, I knew.

"I have devious reasons for the things I do. You told us that you had come to warn us of our deadly danger—as if we didn't know. I told you we were leaving Torbay within the hour, so off you trotted to your little cabin and told them we were going to leave within the hour. So Quinn, Jacques and Kramer came paddling across well in advance of the time you'd told us they would be coming, trusting we would have been lulled into a sense of false security. You must love Mrs. Skouras very much, Charlotte. A clear-cut choice, she or us, and you made your choice. But I was waiting for them, so Jacques and Kramer died. I told you we were going to Craigmore, so off you trotted down to your little cabin and told them we were going there. Later on I told you we were going to Dubh Sgeir. So off you trotted down to your little cabin, but before you could tell them anything you passed out on your cabin deck, possibly as a result of a little night-cap I'd put in your coffee. I couldn't have you telling your friends here that I was going to Dubh Sgeir, could I now? They would have had a reception committee all nicely organised."

"You—you were in my cabin?"

"You were on the floor. I put you to bed. I looked at your arms, incidentally, and the rope marks were gone. They'd used rubber bands, twisted pretty tightly, just before Hunslett and I had arrived?"

She nodded. She looked dazed.

"I also, of course, found the transmitter and gun. Then, back in Craigmore, you came and pumped me for some more information. And you did try to warn me, you were about torn in half by that time. I gave you that information. It wasn't the whole truth, I regret, but it was what I wanted you to tell Lavorski and company, which," I said approvingly, "like a good little girl you did."

"Philip Calvert," she said slowly, "you are the nastiest, sneakingest, most low-down, double-crossing—"

"There are some of Lavorski's men aboard the *Shangri-la*,"

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old Skouras interrupted excitedly. He had rejoined the human race. "They'll get away—"

"They'll get life," I said. "They're in irons."

"But how did you—how did you know where the *Shangri-la* was? In the darkness, in the mist, it's impossible—"

"How's the *Shangri-la*'s tender working?" I asked.

"The what? The *Shangri-la*'s—what the devil—?" He calmed down. "It's not working. Engines out of order."

"Demerara sugar has that effect upon them," I explained. "Any sugar has, in fact, when dumped in the petrol tanks, but demerara was all I could lay hands on that Wednesday night after Sir Arthur and I had left you but before we took the *Firecrest* into the pier. I went aboard the tender with a couple of pounds of the stuff. I'm afraid you'll find the valves are ruined. I also took with me a homing signal transmitter, a transistorised battery-powered job, which I attached to the inner after bulkhead of the anchor locker, a place that's not looked at once a year. So, when you hauled the incapacitated tender aboard the *Shangri-la*—well, we knew where the *Shangri-la* was."

"I'm afraid I don't follow, Calvert."

"Look at Messrs. Dollmann, Lavorski and Imrie. They follow all right. I know the exact frequency that transmitter sends on —after all, it *was* my transmitter. One of Mr. Hutchinson's skippers was given this frequency and tuned in to it. Like all M.F.V.s it has a loop aerial for direction finding, he just had to keep turning the loop till the signal was at full strength. He couldn't miss. He didn't miss."

"Mr. Hutchinson's skippers?" Skouras said carefully. "M.F.V.s you said?"

"Mr. Hutchinson has two shark-fishing boats. Before I came to Dubh Sgeir last night I radioed from one of his boats asking for help—the gentlemen you see here. They said they couldn't send boats or helicopters in this weather, in almost zero visibility. I told them the last thing I wanted was their damned noisy helicopters, secrecy was everything, and not to worry about the sea transport, I knew some men for whom the phrase 'zero visibility' was only a joke. Mr. Hutchinson's skippers. They went to the mainland and brought Captain Rawley and his men back here. I didn't think they'd arrive until late at night, that's why Sir Arthur and I were afraid to move before midnight. What time did you get here, Captain Rawley?"

"Nine-thirty."

"So early? I must admit it was a bit awkward without a radio. Then ashore in your little rubber boats, through the side door,

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waited until the diving-boat came back—and waited and waited."

"We were getting pretty stiff, sir."

Lord Kirkside cleared his throat. "Tell me this, Mr. Calvert. If you radioed from Mr. Hutchinson's boat in Craigmore, why did you have to radio again from here later that night?"

"If I didn't, you'd be down among the dead men by this time. I spent the best part of fifteen minutes giving highly detailed descriptions, of Dubh Sgeir externally and of the castle and boathouse layout internally. Everything that Captain Rawley and his men have done had to be done in total darkness. You'll keep an eye on our friends, Captain Rawley? A fishery cruiser will be off Dubh Sgeir shortly after dawn."

The Marines herded them off into the left-hand cave, set three powerful lights shining into the prisoners' faces and mounted a four-man guard with machine-pistols at the ready.

Charlotte said slowly, "That was why Sir Arthur remained behind this afternoon when you and Mr. Hutchinson went to the *Nantesville*? To see that I didn't talk to the guards and find out the truth?"

"Why else?"

She took her arm away and looked at me without affection. "So you put me through the hoop," she said quietly. "You let me suffer like this for thirty hours while you knew all the time."

"Fair's fair. You were doing me down, I was doing you down."

"I'm very grateful to you," she said bitterly.

"If you aren't, you damn' well ought to be," Uncle Arthur said coldly. "If Calvert won't speak for himself, I will.

"Point one: if you hadn't kept on sending your little radio messages, Lavorski would have thought that there was something damned fishy going on and might well have left the last ton or two of gold in the *Nantesville* and taken off before we got here. Point two: they wouldn't have confessed to their crimes unless they thought we were finished. Point three: Calvert wanted to engineer a situation where all attention was on the *Firecrest* so that Captain Rawley and his men could move into position and so eliminate all fear of unnecessary bloodshed—maybe *your* blood, my dear Charlotte. Point four, and more important: if you hadn't been in constant radio contact with them, advising them of our impending arrival right up to the moment we came through those doors there would have been a pitched battle, guns firing as soon as those doors were breached, and who knows how many lives would have been lost. But they *knew* they were in control, they *knew* the trap was set, they *knew*

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you were aboard with that gun to spring the trap. Point five, and most important of all: Captain Rawley here was hidden almost a hundred yards away along the cross tunnel and the detachment up above were concealed in a store-room in the castle. How do you think *they* knew when to move in and move in simultaneously? Because, like all commandos, they had portable radio sets and were listening in to every word of your running commentary. Don't forget your transmitter was stolen from the *Firecrest*. It was *Calvert*'s transmitter, my dear. He knew the transmitting frequency you were using and radioed that frequency to the mainland last night. That was after he had given you a little something to drink and checked your transmitter before using the one up in the castle last night."

Charlotte said to me, "I think you are the most devious and detestable and untrustworthy man I've ever met." Her eyes were shining, whether from tears or whatever I didn't know. I felt acutely embarrassed and uncomfortable. She put her hand on my arm and said in a low voice, "You fool, oh, you fool! That gun might have gone off. I—I might have killed you, Philip!"

I patted her hand and said, "You don't even begin to believe that yourself." In the circumstances, I thought it better not to say that if that gun had gone off I'd never have trusted a three-cornered file again.

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This Argosy serial was condensed from "When Eight Bells Toll" just published by Collins at 21*s*.

ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ ON PAGE 102

1 Edgar Allan Poe. 2 *A Study in Scarlet*, 1887. 3(a) *From* Russia *With Love*, (b) *The* Moon*stone*, (c) *Trent's Last Case*, (d) *The* Ipcress *File*, (e) *The* Murders *in the Rue Morgue*. 4 Graham Greene—*The Confidential Agent, A Gun for Sale, Loser Takes All, The Ministry of Fear, Our Man in Havana, Stamboul Train, The Fallen Idol, The Third Man*. 5 Erle Stanley Gardner. 6(a) Agatha Christie, (b) G. K. Chesterton, (c) Dorothy Sayers, (d) "Sapper", (e) Dashiell Hammett, (f) Peter Cheyney, (g) Raymond Chandler. 7 His name is John le Carré; his most famous book is *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*. 8 John Buchan. 9(a) Margery Allingham, (b) Dorothy Sayers, (c) Christiana Brand. They are all women. 10 "He" is three people—Frederic Dannay and Manfred Lee, and the fictional detective whom they created. 11 *The Big Sleep*; *Farewell, My Lovely*; *Lady in the Lake*; *The High Window*. 12 Dracula.

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BY ANNE MERRILL

D. H. LAWRENCE once expressed regret that literature and philosophy, since the Greeks, had parted company. Perhaps he would be pleased to see that they are coming together again.

This autumn seems to have produced a spate of allegories with serious intent—four of the books reviewed here have philosophical overtones (or undertones, depending on which way you look at it). And this is intentional, not just fortuitous. But there is a danger here, and most of these books have not entirely avoided it.

A novel is primarily entertainment; and if the story is gripping, then it will succeed without having to make a serious point as well. Of course, there are those rare story-tellers who can achieve both at the same time; for example, William Golding in *Lord of the Flies*.

The danger in writing a story with a moral is to leave out the story. It can make indigestible reading. And I must confess that I discovered the first novel reviewed here with something approaching relief.

☐ **FAR EAST EPIC.** The biggest of this month's offerings, both in size and in conception, is *Tai Pan* by James Clavell (Michael Joseph, 35s.)

Already firmly established as a best-seller in America, this epic, from the author of *King Rat*, has been bought by M.G.M. for a record price. If it is as successful a film as it is a book, there should be a record profit.

Tai Pan is a novel of Hong Kong in the eighteen-forties; of the opium traders who colonised this island with "the finest harbour in the world", and made vast fortunes for themselves and for the British East India company which, in turn, financed Empire-building—and the national craving for tea.

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This was one of the most lawless and dramatic trading eras in history and Clavell gives it panoramic treatment.

His power of story-telling suggests Rider Haggard on a grand scale. Over forty characters—and they *are* characters—are invented and sustained for seven hundred pages with no slackening of pace. In fact, everything about this book is oversize. Dirk Struan, alias Tai Pan (the Chinese for "Supreme Leader"), is "a giant of a man", head of the most powerful trading house, with the biggest fleet of China clippers in the Orient. His exploits are James Bond-like, except that they are more convincing, involve battles of wits rather than weapons, and that he remains unfashionably faithful to May-may, his Chinese mistress. Struan is a sort of nineteenth century Mark Antony, May-may his Cleopatra. He is a big-screen hero; and if we can already hear the sound track in the background, it hardly seems to matter.

The main strength of this novel is as an action story; no philosophising here; and it succeeds as entertainment by being completely absorbing—which, after all, is what a story should be.

If it made sense to say that I couldn't put down a book that takes almost a week to read, I would say it.

☐ **VILLAGE VALUES.** According to the publisher's blurb, Thomas Hinde is supposed to have explored, in *The Village* (Hodder and Stoughton, 30s.), "a major sector of modern British life, as well as a morality about contemporary values . . ."

Well. Full of anticipation, one reads on. But it is, in truth, nothing more than a story of parochial in-fighting and apathy in a village threatened with demolition, with no reference to the outside world at all; and this "major sector of modern British life" consists of Charles, the commuter with a neurotic wife; the Major and his horsy daughter; a mad vicar, an ageing school-mistress, a lonely doctor, a sprinkling of old age pensioners and gaitered farmers with their trousers held up by string; and, for good measure, Willy, the village idiot.

Perhaps the "modern" and the "contemporary" are represented by a group of leather-jacket boys who appear once or twice astride their motorcycles, but do not impinge on the plot.

The book starts well, with a promising character-sketch of Charles dissociating himself from the crowded commuters on the evening train and driving angrily along the wooded lanes towards "his twelve-thousand-pound eight-bedroom house in the village of Henlake." A thrush flies against the radiator grill

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of his car. "Charles kept his foot hard down. Presently he could see it in his driving mirror, small and far back, a fluttering heap in the road.

"He didn't care. He couldn't afford to. Besides, it was natural selection."

But then interest flickers. Caricatures parade past, one by one, and the book meanders to an inconclusive end without really getting anywhere. It could be argued that novels do not aim to get anywhere, and that it is better to travel than to arrive. True; as long as the travelling is interesting and the view out of the window worth looking at.

In this case, there is little to see but fog.

☐ **TRUE TO LIFE?** "A man goes for ten years without speaking to his wife and daughter, although he lives with them under the same roof. At the end of ten years he comes to find out, through an anonymous letter, that his wife is practising the profession of procuress; that she has tried to prostitute her own daughter . . . I was struck by the bad taste—and furthermore the improbability and artificiality—of these facts, in themselves so embarrassing, so distressing and so incredible. I felt that the author of such a novel would be justly accused by critics and readers of having morbid and over-artful imagination."

This is an entry in Francesco's diary. The family situation is his own, and his intention is to keep a diary for two months recording his feelings for his daughter which are, or could become, incestuous; then to extract a novel from the diary.

But the novel never gets written.

The diary, self-analytical and morbid, constitutes Alberto Moravia's latest book, *The Lie* (Secker and Warburg, 30s.).

The diary form is not just chosen as a convenient style of narrative; for outside this diary there is little to narrate. Francesco prefers to write about life rather than live it. He resists the temptation to make love to his daughter simply because this would upset the balance of his projected novel.

Francesco is hardly an attractive character. To achieve a state of complete objectivity and non-involvement in order to write the truth, he thinks himself out of any human feelings whatsoever—in fact, he is attracted not so much by his daughter as by the *idea* of incest.

Yet he cannot write the truth. The diary contradicts itself; he substitutes fantasy for life—nearly always sexual fantasy—then catches himself, as it were, red-handed in the next day's entry and gives us the correct version of what happened.

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The point Moravia seems to be making is that the truth can never be written, even in a diary which aims to represent the truth. For at the moment of recounting an event of his life, the writer is no longer the man who is experiencing it but the man who is writing about it.

Not, perhaps, an original point, but Moravia's technique of illustrating it *is* original.

☐ **ONE MAN'S WAR.** Another novel about non-involvement.

Nigel Dennis' new book *A House in Order* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 18s.) concerns a little man whose life is dedicated to disproving the theory that "No man is an island"; a weak little man with an almost Swiftian dislike for his fellow-creatures. Significantly enough, Nigel Dennis has written a biography of Swift.

Caught up in the war (how did he ever pass his medical?), he hides in a cupboard when his battalion is captured, then spends the rest of his war in a greenhouse outside enemy headquarters, hoping to be left to tend the flowers in peace.

The world, however, will not ignore him. His efforts to avoid trouble bring him responsibility for the death of a harmless soldier; accusations of being a spy; and finally fame as a link in a prisoners' escape route. (When they scuttled, uninvited, into his greenhouse, he sat rigid with terror all night until they left).

Mr. Dennis has made his point; but the novel suffers from over-simplification. It is slight. The story occurs in a vacuum. We are left with no clues about the "hero's" future, and it is impossible to imagine his past.

Even the prose is simplified to—and sometimes beyond—the point of no return. Thus: "The autumn night got cold (temp. approx. 40 deg. F.)"

☐ **PRISON PREDICAMENT.** *The Captive of Zour* by Marc Peyre (Alan Ross, 25s.) has already been published in France and it is now available in English, with a preface by Lawrence Durrell and translated by his wife, Claude.

It tells the somewhat macabre tale of an unknown prisoner who has been confined in the disused prison of Zour for as long as anyone can remember. A jailer is still employed, although the prison is not officially in use. Therefore the existence of the captive is not officially recognised and he can be neither condemned nor reprieved.

The problem is brought before the Town Council. "To smooth

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things over and to cover ourselves, I see only one way out; firmly and simply to deny the existence of the prisoner," concludes one of the councillors.

The author's point is put in a nutshell by the young revolutionary who manages to arrange a tribunal for the forgotten prisoner: "We end up by not seeing things which are always before our eyes, by forgetting them."

The story is, of course, an allegory of values.

Durrell calls it "an ironic investigation of the human predicament, a metaphysical whodunit." The predicament in question, with its overtones of Kafka, is the conflict between humanity and bureaucracy. It could have ended in no other way. In front of the expectant crowd, the secret of the prisoner is finally revealed: —

"As night begins to fall, a stretcher is carried into the square . . ."

On the stretcher—just a tiny bundle of rags.

☐ **NON-MAIGRET.** "If I were allowed to keep only one of all my novels, I would choose this one," writes Georges Simenon of his latest non-Maigret story, *The Little Saint* (Hamish Hamilton, 18s.).

This is because he feels that for the first time he has been able to create "a perfectly serene character," and the story has not turned into tragedy, as most of his earlier novels do.

The Little Saint is one of the illegitimate children of a street seller of fruit and vegetables living in the Rue Mouffetard before the First World War. Sensitive and unaggressive to the point of freakishness, he absorbs all the colours and textures and odours of a squalid early life—the children's mattresses on the floor "smelled of mildewed hay"—and the sounds of what he later discovers to be love-making going on in the same room. His elder brother and sister were peeping through the curtain. " 'Do it to me,' Vladimir ordered. 'Be careful with your teeth.' " Louis was so uninterested that he dozed off.

After all, "Wasn't it like that in every home, in every house, in every family?"

He could have turned out, with a background like that, to be either noted or notorious, and Simenon handles his development skilfully.

Most of the book is the story of a child: the topography of childhood is mapped out in Proustian detail. But his adult life, crammed into the last thirty pages, is too sketchy to satisfy at least this reader's curiosity.

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CROSSWORD PRIZES

This month the *Argosy* Crossword is rather a special one. We are offering readers the chance to have a drink on us at Christmas. Would you like one of these giant "three-bottle" bottles of Long John Scotch Whisky? It will look impressive on your sideboard, and is guaranteed to keep party guests happy. *Argosy*'s Prize Crossword is open only to readers resident in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, whose entries reach us on or before the closing date, Friday, December 9, 1966. Tregnums of Long John Scotch Whisky will be awarded, in time for Christmas, for the first three correct solutions checked on that date. Entries should be completed in ink. Please post your entry with the coupon below in a sealed envelope (stamped 4d.) to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD, 1–2 Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.). If you do not wish to cut *Argosy*, copy your solution on a sheet of plain paper—not forgetting to add your full name and address. Names of the winners and the solution to the puzzle will appear in the earliest possible issue of *Argosy*.

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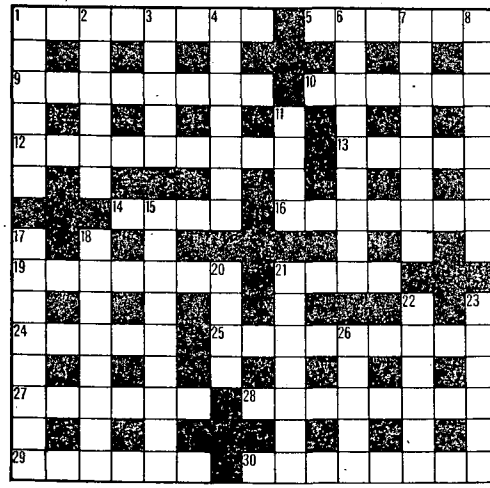
ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Male getting on in a position of responsibility? (8).

5 Tastes acquired by those who create a fishing fleet, no doubt (6).

9 Take a chance? Busy cartoonists do! (4, 4).

10 Ship about to dispatch what every craft requires (6).

12 We'll hurry on in front, Veronica! (9).

13 A predilection of a similar character (5).

14 The males take them away to get drinks! (4).

16 A dog trained to run and beat the favourite, apparently (7).

19 Where a bishop is appointed to superintend? (7).

21 Turn about finished off? (4).

24 Illuminating feature of Somerset or Cheshire (5).

25 Are able to work out in detail (9).

27 Children enjoy weighing one another up on it (6).

28 Switch positions every now and then? (3, 3, 2).

29 Foolish person holding fixed property (6).

30 In actual fact some didn't stay! (8).

DOWN

1 Fashionable doctor taking one particular kind of food (6).

2 "I've a ——, sweeter maiden, in a cleaner, greener land!" (Kipling) (6).

3 Icy form of glide (5).

4 Spicy little things, just crazy about little Margaret! (7).

6 How to get rich? Build a nuclear reactor! (4, 1, 4).

7 Everything I put into a long cloak for Muse of epic poetry (8)

8 Is mistrustful about those who might have done wrong? (8).

11 A pack-animal brought up to run (4).

15 Fall in love and become discouraged, maybe (4, 5).

17 No hearts broken where there's boring work to be done! (5, 3).

18 Bold counsel to the timid (8).

20 A water-carrier we back with little hesitation! (4).

21 Appropriate means of controlling a horse? (7).

22 He's no respecter of law and interrupts a little! (6).

23 Written in gaol? (6).

26 Ring an amateur radio operator up in Nebraska (5).

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